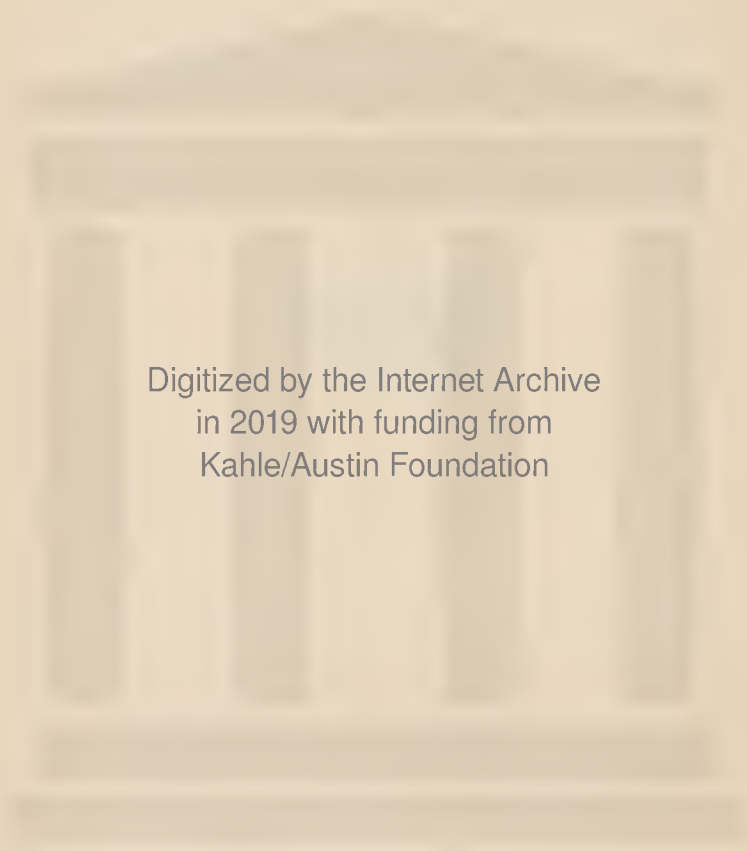


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CALIBAN IN GRUB STREET

CALIBAN
IN
GRUB STREET

BY
RONALD A. KNOX

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I

THE BOOM IN RELIGION

WE are commonly assured that there are signs everywhere of a reawakening public interest in religion. Nor are we to give the less credit to these assurances if we find that the statistics of Church membership show, as they do in almost every denomination, a tendency to decrease. For the "religion" to which England is reawakening is not a religion of creeds and dogmas; nor is the interest taken in the subject such as manifests itself in extreme measures, like going to church. Our modern religiosity is not incompatible with an increase in the proportion of registry-office marriages, or with a series of Sunday mornings spent on the roads and on the golf-links. It is in the inner core of man's nature that the change is to be found; and those delicate yearnings after higher things, tender buds of spirituality, must not be exposed to the rude blasts of pulpit declamation, or the materialistic test of a collection-plate. It is rather in the great open spaces, particularly when these are traversed by metalled roads, that man, modern man, acclimatizes himself to the thought of eternity.

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He makes no parade of his inner feelings ; undemonstrative by habit, he rarely bows the knee in attestation of reverence, makes any preface of devotion when he sits down to a meal or retires to rest ; he keeps a stiff lip, and lets the world write him down an atheist if it will ; but behind this typically English mask of reserve lies a sense, almost unknown before our day, of Godward aspiration and silent commerce with the Unseen.

I wonder. The clerical optimists have been feeding us with these assurances any time during the last quarter of a century, waxing bolder in the affirmation in proportion as there were less ears to take it in, more echoes to whisper it around their churches. It has come to be almost an understood thing that absence from religious worship betokens a higher kind of spiritual temperament ; the pastor leaves the ninety-and-nine to breathe the invigorating airs of the wilderness, and devotes himself to the needs of the one poor weakling which still shivers in the fold. But I have never been able to persuade myself that, if this interest in religious affairs were genuine, it could fail to betray itself in increased church attendance ; curiosity by itself, one would think, ought to bring men to church to find out what is being said there. I do not wish to assert that there is a positive decline of religious feeling ; the hearts of our fellow-men are not open to scrutiny. But I do entertain the uneasy feeling that the symptoms of our time are being widely misread. There is no evidence that people are more religious ; there *is* evidence that people

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are fonder of talking about religion, and of talking about it in public.

It would be encouraging if we could regard this as a healthy sign. But is it not rather our experience that, while men are in health, their health is the last subject which preoccupies them ; that it is only when symptoms of age or decay begin to set in that they air their maladies for public inspection? The same reflection applies to the body politic : in the piping times of Victorian prosperity people did not talk about trade or employment—it would have been almost vulgar : nor did people exercise their minds over the continuance of our world-hegemony ; they took it for granted. It is when the public mind becomes less easy on such topics that they are freely ventilated. If these analogies have any worth, it is difficult not to conclude that a society talks about religion more freely and more publicly when religion is beginning to die out. Like the enfeebled pulse or the dwindling exports, the empty pew begins, for the first time, to arrest our attention.

The facts, indeed, have been patent enough throughout this century. The ripples of that agnosticism which was fashionable among intellectual circles in the later Victorian period widened out slowly over the surface of the public mind, but none the less effectively. Meanwhile, the growth of the Labour movement had neutralized the political appeal and sapped the political strength of Nonconformity. Increased facilities for worldly enjoyment had whetted the appetite for it ; popular education had encouraged men to

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specialize over their hobbies ; a general loss of simplicity began to tell upon the vitality of our insular religion, which had always depended upon a soil of unadventurous conservatism to fertilize its influence. The War at once intensified the action of these forces, and opened our eyes to the inroads they had already made on public feeling. For years past we had not been going to church ourselves ; now we began to notice that other people were not going to church either. And we began to ask ourselves : “ This religion, what is it ? What is this orientation of the mind, which some people adopt without showing much sign of being the better or the worse for it, which other people abandon with so little reluctance, with so little immediate effect upon their conduct or their philosophy of living ? ” We had not supposed that our absence from the eleven o’clock service would make any difference to our own attitude, in time or in eternity. But was it possible that wholesale abstinence on the part of some nine-tenths of the population would entail no consequences whatever ?

Meanwhile we had noticed for ourselves, or the newspapers had told us, that the parsons were not proclaiming—some of them at any rate—the same authoritative gospel in which we had been brought up. They had abandoned the notion that the Bible was literal truth, to be squared somehow with human experience, and were proceeding to do without the Bible, filling in the gaps with spiritual guess-work of their own. And this bred in us an itch for private theologies. So long as the parsons were only

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expounding to us a book, written in two languages with which we were unfamiliar, we bowed to the expert ; we took it or left it, but if we took it we assumed, rightly enough, that our spiritual pastors knew more than we did about jots and tittles and the manifold uses of the aorist tense. But if it was to be every man for himself, why should not we plunge into the fray? We were not going to admit that a man had a deeper religious insight than ourselves merely because he wore his collar the wrong way round. Nothing is more characteristic of the Reformation period than the outbreak of amateur theologies which was occasioned by the disintegration of religion in Europe. Any tinker or weaver thought that, if he had the Bible open before him, he had as good a right to construct a theology out of it for himself as to accept a theology at second hand from a recognized preacher. Why not? The old notion of a teaching Church had been abandoned ; the publication of the English text was an invitation to the would-be theologian. They swarmed, these unauthorized prophets, in their day ; we remember the Foxes, but we have forgotten the Naylors. Not otherwise, when the Bible in its turn was abandoned as a medium of infallible revelation, did the monopoly of religious initiative pass out of the hands of a privileged caste, to become the property of the average man. The logic of the situation demanded “ One man, one gospel ”.

I do not mean that in our day, as soon as men become detached from organized religion, they incontinently become

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prophets. I mean that, if theological subjects crop up in general conversation, men are no longer restrained from taking a part in it by their sense of inexperience—their sense that a hazy memory of the missionary journeys, dating from school days, does not equip them for interpreting the oracles of God. When the English nation lost its love of the Bible, it still retained a sense of respect for the Bible, on the principle of *omne ignotum pro magnifico*. But now that theologians themselves have given up treating the Bible as a last court of appeal, and fall back on their own inner consciousnesses to justify their doctrinal statements, it seems hard to see why Hobbs, Nobbs, Noakes and Stokes should not have their inner consciousnesses too. I once tried to pose an eminent Anglican divine with the question, how he could preach the doctrine of eternal punishment, holding the views he held about authority in religion ; to which he replied, pointing at his chest, that “ something in here ” ratified the judgment which he had already derived from Scripture. Once you invoke that “ something in here ”, you put doctrine at the mercy of a multiplicity of chests, varying much in their capacity. And that is exactly what has happened. Man, who is the measure of all things else, has become the measure of theology. Every passer-by can join, nowadays, in the hue and cry after ultimate truth.

And then the Press came into the business.

We are accustomed to hear the Press criticized from two diametrically opposite angles. On the one side, we are told that the Press is a tyrannous institution, which can make us

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do what it likes, say what it likes, even think what it likes, through the power of mass suggestion. That it can give many-tongued publicity to one side of a case, conceal all the facts which tell on the other side of the case, and silence all opposition with the magic formula: "This correspondence must now cease". That in time of war it can dictate our national policy, creating a mood of intransigence so long as it pleases, and replacing it by a mood of weariness; that when a strike happens, it can turn us all into bourgeois, and make us into democrats again when the police show signs of exceeding their normal powers. That, by agitation, it can dismiss valuable public servants, or foist quack remedies upon the public taste; that, by its silence, it can connive at any form of graft or corruption, and thwart the very possibility of reform. In a word, that the Press is our master; the oracle which the knaves of the world work in their own interest, and the plain man accepts as an ultimate authority.

On the other side, we are told that the Press has in truth no mind and no policy of its own, and thrives in proportion as it panders to the existing public taste. That it "writes down" to the intelligence of its simplest reader, and caters for the inquisitive passion of the most depraved. That, if a popular newspaper supports what seems to be a strong and independent line of policy, the explanation lies in the fact that "inside information" has enabled the editor to detect the signs of an approaching change; that the prominence with which any news item is reported is exactly

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proportioned to the number of readers who will think that item worth their notice. That the same paper, at times of public excitement (for example, when a general election is in prospect) will blow hot and cold by turns, fearing nothing so much as to have been found unsympathetic to the voice of the majority. In a word, that the Press is our slave ; it reflects all our prejudices, and we, unconscious of its sycophancy, rejoice to find those prejudices ratified by the verdict of an apparently independent critic.

Both these estimates are true. In all government, however tyrannous, you must in the last resort take into account the feelings of the governed ; there is a limit beyond which you cannot go. And a newspaper is restrained in its effort to impose ideas upon its readers by two considerations. In the first place, you must not lose circulation, or otherwise imperil the financial position of the paper, for example by offending important advertisers ; but these are elementary precautions, which nobody with experience of the trade finds any difficulty in taking. The second qualification is far more serious ; *you must not appear to have failed*. It must not be said that you tried to run a stunt, and the public would not rise to it. Hence the sudden disappearance, after four or five issues, of some topic which seemed likely to fill the newspaper's columns for a month ; it did not " catch on " ; and the briefness of the public memory can be trusted to bury it if all allusion to it is suddenly withdrawn. Hence the cryptic attitude of our oracle before an election ; like its Delphic predecessor, it takes refuge in baffling generalities

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and saving clauses. Whatever happens, it must not be said that you told the electorate to vote one way and it voted the other.

The effect of all this is a delicate equipoise of forces between the Press and the public. The man who owns a large number of newspapers inevitably wants to influence the public ; he cannot be content merely to record events, merely to mirror opinion. He must exert an influence ; what influence, it does not much matter, but he must feel his power over the minds of men. And at the same time he is cramped by the consciousness that if he moves far outside their common orbit the minds of men will not rally to his suggestions, and the laugh will be against him. The true artist in journalism, then, wants to pick up some idea that is already, dimly and germinally, present to the public mind, and to popularize that idea so effectively that he might almost pass for the inventor of it. Occasionally he may succeed in indoctrinating the public mind with a notion that was not present to it before ("Community Singing" was a case in point). But ordinarily he must first take his cue from the public before he can induce the public to take its cue from him. Men, after all, are children, and the Press is a kind of governess that must first (for the sake of peace) find out what game the children want to play, and then (for the sake of discipline) appear to have been the originator of the suggestion.

All this is not to say that the Press exercises no power. If it does not, as a rule, originate our public sentiment, it

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crystallizes and focusses it ; if it does not dictate to us what we are to say, it makes us go on saying what we were saying before, with more confidence and with less fear of contradiction. We all know how an opinion which has long been lurking at the back of our minds takes shape and gains strength once we have aired it in an argument ; how a grievance hitherto dimly felt becomes explicit and positive once we have indulged in the luxury of ventilating it. So it is with the Press, which has become a public voice for us moderns ; it cannot often set a match to the train, but it can fan the fires that were only smouldering. If one of our more popular dailies were to start a campaign of hate against some foreign country, let us say a commercial rival like the United States of America, it would only be giving expression to a feeling which in some measure already exists ; but it would be guilty (quite apart from the effect on the other side of the Atlantic) of intensifying and rallying that feeling by the mere fact of the expression. In short, the Press does not actually mould opinion, but it hardens the mould into which opinion is already setting, and exaggerates, to some extent, the contours which it is destined to take.

So it was with us, rather more than three years ago, when the thing started. Some enterprising editor—I forget who was first in the field—realized that Englishmen were prepared to talk about religion ; no longer (as in 1914) about the niceties of Church Government or the ethics of subscription to formulas, but about the whole roots of religion, its possible place in life, and the existence of any super-

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natural fact corresponding to our spiritual needs. Since then, at short intervals, we have constantly been invited to hear the views of well-known public men on this or that theological topic, by a range of papers so widely separated from one another in tone and treatment as the *Spectator* and *Tit-Bits*. Whether this public discussion of our most intimate feelings is a desirable thing, opinions have differed. Thus Sir Harry Lauder, writing in one series, says : " Men and women are no longer shy in discussing their intimate beliefs and convictions. This is fine ". Whereas a well-known manufacturer of motor-cars, asked to explain how he looks at life, dismisses the subject with the words : " On the point of religion, I do not regard it as seemly to bring it forward here ". But whether we approve or disapprove, we must be prepared nowadays to open the morning paper and find such headlines as IF YOU SHOULD FACE CHRIST TOMORROW, and HELL'S LOST PRESTIGE.

The form which these discussions take has become almost stereotyped ; it is the symposium. " Letters to the editor " do indeed pour in once the ball has been set rolling, and some few of them are published. But the public has more love of writing such letters than of reading them. I have heard that Bishop Stubbs, in addressing his ordination candidates just before the ceremony, always concluded his advice to them by saying : " And, for God's sake, don't write to the papers ". The warning is either no longer given or no longer heeded ; you cannot throw a religious correspondence open to the public without being deluged with

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letters from the clergy ; and these, at once, give a professional turn to the whole controversy, which is bad journalism—the public does not like shop. Again, there are very few amateur controversialists who have any notion of sticking to the point ; and a newspaper correspondence nearly always irritates the reader by assuming, what is seldom true, that he has yesterday's issue open before him as well as to-day's. The symposium gives you better value ; you miss the excitement of controversialists crossing swords, but you secure a pleasing variety among the spokesmen who are called upon to take part. The Press loves irrelevancy ; it interviews an actress not about her acting but, for preference, about her pet puma. It used to retain Monsignor Benson to report a football match ; now it will catechize a Rugby footballer about his belief in the efficacy of prayer. Thus you get all points of view represented—at least in the headlines.

The occasional inclusion of a specialist in theology, or at least of some contributor committed to a religious formula—a Catholic, for example, or a spiritualist—does no harm. But for the most part your symposium demands free-lance treatment ; by the very force of its derivation, the word implies that you should collect a casual party, such as might reasonably be found meeting at the dinner-table of some lion-hunting hostess. The best type for your purpose is the journalist who signs his name, or the popular novelist who does occasionally write an article for the papers. A philosopher or a scientist will be too technical ; a tennis

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champion will have no idea how to write, and the sub-editor will be put to the trouble of reducing the thing to English. Gigadibs, the literary man—he (though he has an unfortunate habit of knowing his market price) is the most valuable witness you can subpoena for this inquest upon the late religion of our country.

And let it not be supposed that, by sending out your *questionnaire* to such talented souls, you are in danger of a merely high-brow result. You will not get a series of brilliant epigrams, unsatisfying to the taste of earnest inquirers after truth. On the contrary, your literary man becomes a simple soul at once when you can induce him to talk about his private feelings. The spiritual experiences of Gigadibs are not on a more rarefied level than those of Hobbs, Nobbs, Noakes and Stokes, although he may have learned to express them lucidly and to set them forth attractively. Mr Arnold Bennett, as we shall see, has been granted the faith of the charcoal-burner—assuming, of course, that the charcoal-burner has never heard of Christianity. And indeed, why should we expect it to be otherwise? There are souls to whom doubts about religious truth have meant a long series of mental tortures, a crucifixion of the spirit. But it would be a grave mistake to suppose that this is the common experience; to the ordinary man—and most popular authors are quite ordinary men—the abandonment of the religious beliefs with which he was indoctrinated in childhood is no more difficult than falling off a log. (I am speaking here of people who have been

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brought up in non-Catholic systems of theology.) And the recovery of some kind of spiritual orientation, which comes to most people (for we are not made to live without God altogether), is not, commonly, the result of any laborious process of investigation; it comes to them when they marry, or when they have loved and lost, or in the mere experience of everyday living, without conscious effort. In all this, the popular author is quite typical of the general public.

But indeed, there is still more to be said in favour of this principle of selection. The popular author or journalist is not merely representative of the public in the sense that he is typical; he is representative also in the sense that it is his business to study its moods and to interpret its aspirations. A popular writer, if he is to remain popular, must share the common standards of the world around him, must react easily to every change in its atmosphere. Nobody, for example, who has followed the career of Mr Wells can have failed to notice this representative quality in him; during the War, particularly, how well he fell in with our fire-eating state of mind in the early stages, with our questioning, idealist attitude in the middle of it, with our half-despairing mood at the end of it! What has been said above about the Press applies, with qualifications, to the publicists who write for the Press; they lead our thought only by foreseeing the direction it is taking, and keeping slightly ahead of us all the time. Who, then, is better suited to interpret the public mind on religious matters than Gigadibs? For

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Gigadibs is professionally qualified to interpret the movements of our thought, professionally interested in reproducing them. His attitude about wealth and poverty, about marriage and divorce, about war and peace, about tradition and innovation, must be the attitude of the common herd ; otherwise, his publisher would complain. And when we read what Gigadibs writes about the soul or a future life, we know at once what the public is saying about these subjects, only not saying it quite so well.

This book is an attempt to put together, to systematize, and perhaps incidentally to criticize, the results thus obtained ; an attempt, in fact, to examine the dogmas of the modern mind as the prophets of the modern mind have set them forth for us. And let nobody fight shy of the word *dogma*. An extraordinary superstition has grown up nowadays that a dogma is something which is forced down the throats of an unwilling public by an official caste which feels competent to instruct it ; the Latin word *dogma*, you know, derived from the verb *doceo*, *I teach*. It need hardly be pointed out that this whole modern use of the word *dogma* is a misuse of it ; that a dogma is exactly the opposite of what these people mean by it. It is not a Latin word at all ; it comes from the Greek verb *δοκεῖ*, *it seems good*, and means, not something which one man tries to force down the throats of other men, but something on which a number of different people, coming to the question from different parts of the world and with different mental backgrounds, are all unanimously agreed. In the old ages of faith, the

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representatives who met to see whether they could arrive at a dogma, or common ground of agreement, were bishops from different parts of the world, each of them concerned to publish the tradition which had been handed down in his particular part of the world from the predecessors who had held the see before him. In our day, the gentlemen who write for the papers hold the same kind of Pontifical position ; they do not impose their views on us, they interpret for us the kind of views which are held by the kind of people whom they represent—the majority, that is, of the ten millions or so in this country who are in the habit of reading print.

These dogmas, already confusedly present to men's minds, have recently been acquiring definiteness and positiveness, as I say, from the mere fact that they have recently been allowed to appear, over Gigadibs's signature, in the papers. And there can be no harm in taking stock of them ; in estimating how far we have travelled from the comfortable beliefs of our grandfathers. I must not, of course, be understood to suggest that the newspaper boom in religion has reached, directly, any considerable part of the population. I doubt if one reader in ten actually ploughs his way through such contributions. Even that amount of public interest is sufficient to affect the popularity of a given newspaper ; more especially when it is remembered that religious controversies will sometimes make the clergy extend their patronage to it. No, the direct effect of all these disputations may be small, but the public atmosphere which they create will have a wider importance. Let us face the facts, and

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decide for ourselves what it is that our fellow-citizens believe, or at any rate would like to think that they believe.

I do not claim to have made a complete collation of these theological monuments. But I have before me as I write a volume published by the *Daily Express*, which includes *Is Prayer answered?, I believe in—*, and *How I look at Life*; another symposium, originally attributable to the same paper, called *My Religion*; another, *Where are the Dead?*, from the *Daily News*; also back numbers of the *Daily Express* containing *God in These Times*, of the *Sunday Chronicle* containing *The Outlook of the Churches*, of the *Daily Telegraph* containing *If I were a Preacher* and *The Reality of Hell*; also some odd copies of *Everyman* and *Tit-Bits*. Even these have to be sifted before they are useful for my present purpose; I do not wish to make any comment on contributions by recognized religious leaders who have a professional interest in the subjects which they are treating. But if some of the straws from which I hoped to make bricks have been carried away beyond recovery, they have served, at least, to show me which way the wind blew, and the matter I have by me is sufficient, I hope, for purposes of documentation.

I had been ambitious to give my book the title *Gigadibs upon Setebos*, for indeed it is Gigadibs nowadays who does the talking, and poor Bishop Blougram

“Plays with spoons, explores his plate’s design,
And ranges olive stones about its edge,
While the great *causeur* rolls him out his mind”.

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But, as I have said, it is not precisely the literary man, as such, that interests us here ; it is the natural man, with his natural theology, trying to build up anew the faith which seems lost. I shall hope to show that this natural theology is really an unnatural theology, because it is usually an illogical patchwork with stray threads of Christianity worked in here and there. But natural theology it aspires to be ; and it is in the character of the natural man that Gigadibs comes forward ; let him not be offended, therefore, if I nickname him *Caliban*, adding only *Grub Street* for an address, lest some of my words should go astray in the delivery. Let me proceed, without further apology, to the easiest part of my task ; the analysis, namely, of those negations which are common to the bulk of our symposiasts ; let us get it clear, first of all, what these gentlemen mean when they tell us that the Christianity of the churches has failed, and that some new revelation is necessary, if we are to satisfy the spiritual hunger of human kind.

II

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MR ARNOLD BENNETT, in the *My Religion* series, begins at once with the confession: "I do not believe, and never have at any time believed, in the divinity of Christ, the Virgin Birth, the Immaculate Conception, heaven, hell, the immortality of the soul, the divine inspiration of the Bible". The statement lacks, perhaps, scientific precision. Does Mr Bennett believe in original sin? I imagine not; and if he does not believe in original sin, then he believes in the Immaculate Conception; not merely in the Immaculate Conception of our Lady, but in the immaculate conception of everybody else. Again, as Dr Norwood pointed out at the time, it was not easy to reconcile Mr Bennett's disbelief in the immortality of the soul with his subsequent admission: "On a balance of probabilities, I am inclined to accept the theory of a future life". But Dr Norwood should not have been so hard on him; these slips of the mind will occur, when one is writing in a hurry.

Most of the contributors, however, occupy themselves with a slight autobiographical preface, mentioning that they were taught such and such doctrines in their youth, and came to disbelieve in them. Mr Walpole, who was intended for a clerical career, went to work as a layman in the Liverpool

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docks, and there "everything crumbled ; before the realities of the life I was now facing I was compelled to ask myself questions"—what questions, he does not say. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who was educated as a Catholic, quarrelled with the doctrine of original sin and with that of the Atonement. Mr Beresford, when he was just twenty-one, "in a single evening came over, as it were, into the scepticism of the later part of the nineteenth century". Mr de Vere Stacpoole was bored with church-going from the first, but gives us no clue as to the age at which he took an independent line, or his direct motive for doing so. Mr Henry Arthur Jones had the same difficulties as Mr Beresford, though he took longer over the process.

In fact, Mr Walpole's experience seems to be the general experience, that there are three states of discovery in most people's lives, "first, the child's acceptance of dogmas handed over to it by its elders ; second, the adolescent's reaction against that acceptance ; and, third, the evolution of some positive personal opinion". And it would seem that the world itself is in much the same position ; it may be in the second stage, or in the third, or emerging from the second into the third ; but that it has left behind its childlike acceptance of dogma is everywhere assumed. Indeed, I have seldom come across a drearier piece of reading than Mr Phillips Oppenheim's contribution to the series. "Without any hope or fear of the hereafter we should logically become a world of lunatics", he tells us ; "yet all those forms of faith and belief which from the

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earliest days of history have produced a countless procession of saints and heroes, have grown fainter throughout the generations until to-day it really seems as though in future ages, not far removed from our own, all established forms of worship will die from inanition". Centuries ago, religion was an easy thing; nowadays, religion "as expressed by any definite formulæ is sinking fast into the background of our lives". Nor is he prepared to suggest any theology, however unformulated, to fill the gap in our lives; he only tells us that there are implanted in us "certain aspirations towards a world-morality"; and therefore, though we are "fundamentally selfish by the logic of necessity", we can, "at the cost of a little thought" carry on the fight "without undue hurt to others". This consciousness, unless we have "the rare gift of absolute faith", is the best consolation we can hope for on our death-beds.

What, then, in the mind of this thinker, is the precise point of departure at which the modern age has broken away from the tradition of its predecessors? It would be difficult to say. Unlike some of his fellow-authors, Mr Oppenheim finds a disinclination to serious talk among his younger contemporaries. It seems "as though the whole world of men as well as women were afflicted with a curious shyness when the subject of religion is even indirectly alluded to. In these days of bridge and mah-jongg" (dear, dear, how quickly the world moves on nowadays!), "universal dancing and freer intercourse between the sexes, the

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habitude of conversation between men at their clubs and other meeting-places has naturally enough declined". In short, we do not think very much about religion; "for the most part we accept our destiny with a curious mixture of fatalism and an ostrich-like capacity for burying our heads in the sand until the last moment". All this "is scarcely our fault. It is a matter often, when one contemplates the simple, joyous lives of past generations, for deep and bitter regret that the whole-hearted, unquestioning faith with which they accepted the priest-expounded explanations of the problems of the universe has in a large measure become impossible to dwellers in this bustling world of ours". Really, if one had only Mr Oppenheim in the witness-box, one would be tempted to wonder whether our age has really seen through the theological beliefs of its forefathers, and has not merely looked the other way.

But we may surely hope that the other authors will give us some indication where it is, exactly, that they quarrel with the religious tradition from which they have broken away. The curious thing is that they do not. They avoid, as far as possible, all reference to the actual doctrines of traditional Christianity, and only comment on them by way of illustration occasionally; singling out, we must presume, those which make its unreasonableness most evident. And when they do this, they seem more concerned to give a debating account of the doctrine they are attacking than an accurate statement of it, still less any *résumé* of its history. Miss Rebecca West, for example, is characteristic in her

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discussion of the Virgin Birth: "Certain forms which Christianity had to take to satisfy the needs of the man of that age are unsuited to the man of this age. There is, for instance, the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. The ordinary pre-Christian man was not accustomed to the idea of moral power unsupported by force". Yet the ordinary pre-Christian man admired Socrates and Cato, without finding it necessary to suppose that they had not been born in the ordinary way of nature. "It would have been impossible to convince him that a man was divine simply because his behaviour was supremely beautiful". I am afraid that to this extent I am myself pre-Christian. I should regard it as monstrous to call a man "divine", unless his behaviour was, in the literal sense, superhumanly beautiful; and who am I that I should judge what are the possible limits of a purely human character? "Therefore, Christ had to be recommended to him by the ascription of a miraculous origin". "Had to be"—in fact, the story was invented, a lie with a moral purpose. "Now that we have Christ's lesson set before us this is quite unnecessary". What, exactly, is meant by "now"? The lesson has been before us for nineteen centuries; for eighteen at least of those centuries men believed in the Virgin Birth; at what point did the necessity for the gracious fiction cease?

In all this, it will be seen, Miss West assumes that the doctrine is a lie, without discussing her reasons for thinking it so. What she really ought to have been talking about was not the Virgin Birth but the Resurrection. For, as every-

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body knows who knows anything about the history of religion, it was not the Virgin Birth but the Resurrection which was the favourite topic for the earliest preachers of Christianity. And the Resurrection was much better calculated than the Virgin Birth to produce the impression which Miss West refers to. If a Man whose behaviour is divinely beautiful is crucified, it is His Resurrection from the dead that will give us the impression of a supernatural force supporting the moral power of His character. Why, then, did Miss West not choose the Resurrection as her instance? Because she felt she was not on quite safe ground ; there is a lot of alleged evidence to be gone into ; also, she had the idea that bishops and people often deny the Virgin Birth, but draw the line at the Resurrection. So she chose this instance, where she thought our case was weaker. She has dismissed the Christian religion, but she is not going to tell us why.

So, immediately afterwards, she makes play with the doctrine of the Atonement. “ That a father should invent the laws of a game knowing that they must be broken, force people to play it, sentence the players to punishment for breaking them, and accept the agony of his son as a substitute for the punishment, was credible enough to people who believed that hate might be the ultimate law of life. To us who have been given the Christian idea of love and mercy as an essential part of divinity, it is not credible”. The case she attacks is, of course, a farrago of false theology. It assumes that right is right and wrong is wrong only

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because God, by a caprice, chose to make them so ; it assumes (by the use of the word “ must ”) a Calvinist idea of predestination ; it assumes that our Lord’s Agony was a price demanded from Him, instead of a voluntary Oblation. It conceals the fact that our notions of love and mercy have been drilled into us by nothing else than centuries of belief in the Atonement. But, once more, she is not concerned to state a case fairly or to meet an imaginary opponent in argument ; she assumes that the thing is untrue, and hastens on to assure us that it does not matter.

Nor is Miss West alone in this ; everywhere I find that these well-meaning authors never mention orthodox doctrines without taking good care to discredit them by a travesty in their representation. Thus Mr de Vere Stacpoole: “ It is the attempt to depict God as a Person, a superior sort of clergyman with the attribute of a magistrate and a school-master, a hanging judge and a loving Father, that I am sure has been accountable for a great deal of the growth of disbelief and the birth of the age of reason among ordinary men”. When we preach the age of Reason, we should at least avoid the elementary fallacy of Many Questions. But Mr Stacpoole has obviously not made up his mind whether it is the doctrine of a Personal God that has offended the common sense of mankind, or whether the doctrine of a supposedly vindictive God has outraged our moral taste. And he is not going to take the trouble to clear up his own mind ; he will shoot it all out at us anyhow, feeling confident that some of the mud will stick.

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Mr Drinkwater, in the series *God in These Times*, adopts an even subtler form of misrepresentation. Man, he tells us, has often found it necessary “to envisage his idea of God in some concrete form that could satisfy his rational senses”. (Have you any idea what rational senses are? No; no more has Mr Drinkwater; but it would do well enough for this kind of article.) “Zeus and Thor and Osiris and Jehovah and the Great Spirit have been mediums through which man has been able to translate his awareness of God into tangible images that he could visualize, that he could even represent in marble or wood or paint. . . . The distinction between one image and another has been the source of countless wars and outrages and persecutions”. That reads all right when you read it the first time over. The second time of reading, you see what has happened. Omit the words “and Jehovah and the Great Spirit”, and you have a roughly true though rather highly coloured statement. But the whole point of the alleged revelation which first gave rise to the word *Jehovah* is that God is *not* capable of being represented by any image; that it is sinful to portray Him in any way; indeed, the very word *Jehovah* is a kind of alias concealing an unutterable name—so far from being represented by images, the God of the Jews could not really be represented, they felt, even by an arrangement of letters! But Jehovah has been ranged up alongside of the others, to be part subject of a statement which applies accurately enough to the other names mentioned; and then “the Great Spirit” has been put in, with equal irrelevancy,

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to show that of course Mr Drinkwater is not aiming his statement particularly at the Jewish or at the Christian religion. It is a clever piece of trickery, but it is trickery none the less. And at the end of it all we do not know whether Mr Drinkwater is attacking the people who think that God has a shape or a position in space, which we Christians certainly do not ; or people who (like us and unlike the Mohammedans) think it is lawful to represent God *metaphorically* in the form of a King, a Dove, a Lamb, and so on.

Even Mr Bennett, who by his own account has never believed in these priest-expounded dogmas, and therefore has not to apologize for the desertion of them, cannot get them right when he tries to state them. He says: "I absolutely dismiss the extraordinary and too convenient notion that a man may safely do as he chooses provided he dies in a certain faith. Such a notion insults my reason. I do not say that it insults everybody's reason, for, obviously, it does not, but merely that it insults mine". One sees the idea ; how can Mr Bennett be expected to be a Christian when Christians believe extraordinary things like that? Now, I would not like to say that there may not have been, at some time, antinomian Calvinists who did assert something of the sort. But Mr Bennett was naturally taken to task by various correspondents for suggesting that this was anything like the belief of a normal Christian. In his reply, he writes : " For myself, I was brought up in the dogma that a death-bed repentance and a sincere declaration of Christian belief would secure heaven for the vilest sinner. And beyond

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doubt this doctrine is still being preached in hundreds of pulpits". Exactly ; what he meant to say was that he did not believe in death-bed repentances, did not believe in the Penitent Thief. But he could not be content to say that ; he must needs represent the dogma in question by a formula which brought in something totally different, the relation between faith and good works ; he must needs imply, for the benefit of the less instructed public, that in the opinion of the ordinary Christian faith avails without charity. And that is untrue.

One may disbelieve in formulas, but that is no reason for getting the formulas wrong. Let it not be supposed that the considerations which I have been bringing forward are merely captious objections ; that I am higgling over small points of language in order to discredit the authority of the writers from whom I am quoting ; or even that I am complaining (though in some cases the complaint would be reasonable) that people who undertook to write on a subject of such importance might have taken more trouble over their task. I am not complaining ; I am merely illustrating an impression I get when I read all these essays in the reconstruction of belief. And the impression is this—that the authors, and countless others whom they represent, have grown out of the religion of their childhood without ever exactly discovering what it was ; and that they are suggesting substitutes for it not because they have decided that there is nothing in it, but because they have assumed that there is nothing in it. They have thrown the creeds

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into the waste-paper basket, I fancy, not because they disbelieved in them, but because they were creeds. And when it becomes necessary to show why the creeds were unsatisfactory, they have a slight difficulty in remembering what it was all about.

I say "not because they disbelieved in them, but because they were creeds". I honestly doubt whether our modern malady is not a kind of spiritual indigestion, based on mere nervous habit, which rejects strong meat as such, and with no notion why it does so. Or, if I may vary the metaphor, I would say that we are suffering from a kind of claustrophobia, which breaks away from institutional religions and from the creeds by which institutional religions live, not because it does not believe in them but because it does not *want* to believe in them. It will accept, for example, the existence of God only if it can feel that this is a personal discovery, not anything that was taught, not anything that was handed down.

This claustrophobia manifests itself, it seems to me, in a kind of conspiracy-mania on the subject of religious persecution. It is, as we know, a generally accepted maxim of the age that no coercion ought to be exercised with the idea of persuading anybody to relinquish a creed which he holds, or embrace a creed which he does not hold. Or rather, the only legitimate form of coercion is financial pressure brought to bear on Catholics. Thus, it is still possible for a man to make a will which excludes his heirs from their inheritance if they become Catholics; or even one which

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founds scholarships at the university for "Protestants", that is for people who may or may not believe in God, but certainly do not believe in the Pope. With this significant exception, the spirit of the age will not tolerate any interference with the religious convictions of our neighbours. Now, why is it that this principle, which has long since passed into a commonplace, so haunts the imagination of Gigadibs when he comes to write about his religion? Why is Lady Jane Grey's head still a King Charles's head to our twentieth-century symposiasts?

Mr Birrell, for example, when he contributed to the series *If I were a Preacher*, gave us a very racy sermon on religious intolerance, taking his text from the last Unitarian who was burned at Smithfield in 1612. (He might have brought his thesis a little more up to date by reference to the Catholics who were butchered on a trumped-up charge in the reign of Charles II.) Why, he asks himself, does he revive these memories of a buried past? "Which of us expects to see a Dr James Martineau, or any other Unitarian, burnt to ashes in Piccadilly Circus? This may be true, so far as the Unitarians are concerned; but what about the Trinitarians a century hence? It is never wise to dismiss anything as impossible because it is disagreeable". In a word, Mr Birrell seems to fear persecution of the more orthodox by the less orthodox. Contrariwise Mr Mottram, in the series *God in These Times*: "I have the law on my side, which says I may, in England, believe what and how I like. If that law is going to be altered—and lately it has seemed to me

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not impossible—I am going to fight, as some of my family did three hundred years ago, for similar reasons”. I do not believe that Mr Mottram’s ancestors fought for religious toleration ; or if they did, they proved strangely inconsistent with their own principles when they came out top-dog. But I have no doubt Mr Mottram is quite sincere in his belief ; only, what is he worrying about ? What signs of the times make him fear a persecution by Trinitarians, while Mr Birrell is fearing a persecution by Unitarians ?

Echoes of the same alarm greet us everywhere. Mr Walpole says : “ My *credo* is that I believe that one of the first necessities for a human being is an absolute tolerance for the religious discoveries of every other human being ”. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle refers to the infernal system of the Inquisition. Miss West finishes her article by saying that “ the spirit of tolerance represents the merciful hand of Christ thrust through ages ”. Mr Drinkwater, as we have seen, criticizes that love of “ images ” which has been the source of countless wars and outrages and persecutions. If Mr Bertrand Russell were a preacher, he would give us a long sermon on Fear, to the use of which as a social expedient he traces the prevalence of adenoids and other undesirable consequences. Now, this instinctive identification of orthodoxy in religion with the denial of religious liberty to others might be intelligible in other conditions ; but in our country and in our day, with the apologists of Christianity ready to “ roar you as meekly as any sucking dove ”, what is the need for all this emphasis on the subject ? My own

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diagnosis is a simple one ; I would put it down as a hallucination incidental to the spiritual claustrophobia I have described.

Children are brought up, and always will be brought up, on certain traditions. They will be taught, for example, not to bite their nails ; by the time they have come of age, they will themselves think it dirty to bite one's nails, but they will not be able, any more than their parents, to return an answer to the "Why not?" of outraged childhood. Traditions there will always be ; there always has been, and still is, a custom of handing down certain religious traditions with the rest. Now, the attitude of mind which continues to accept these parental traditions without ever inquiring about them, if such an attitude of mind really exists (which I doubt), may be unadventurous, but it is at least normal ; it finds certain dogmas in possession, and leaves them in possession. The attitude of mind which, with maturer years, inquires into the source of these traditions and estimates the value of the guarantees which back them, and so proceeds either to accept or to reject them, is a normal attitude. But the attitude of mind which rejects them without examining them, and then after a few years more complains that it has no religion, and then after a few years more cries loudly that it has discovered a religion for itself—that attitude of mind seems to me simply morbid. You would suppose that some *Œdipus-complex* was at work, to make that which we have heard with our ears, and our fathers have told us, for that very reason unacceptable.

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Yet that is what it comes to, when you have got rid of all the flourishes, this attitude of double reaction which Mr Walpole seems to regard as the inevitable destiny of his generation.

That the sense of religion should burn low with adolescence, that men and women should lose interest in their own spiritual concerns when life is beating high in them, is intelligible enough. Intelligible, too, that maturity should reverse this tendency ; that when the problem of living becomes more urgent and the pulses are somewhat chilled, they should look for some more permanent orientation. Now, it would be natural to expect that, having reached this climacteric of their theological career, they should go back over the beliefs of their childhood and at least submit them to a re-examination. True, they had those beliefs drilled into them at an age when they were too young to understand them. But it is equally true that they dropped those beliefs at an age when they were too young to understand them ; it takes more than the smartness of the undergraduate to learn some lessons. It would be natural, I say, that they should at least *desire* to return to the beliefs of their childhood, since these are the beliefs by which their fathers lived and in which they faced death. But do they show any such desire? On the contrary, they show a morbid reaction from it.

“No dogmas!” they cry, “no creeds! No formulas!” They talk as if all tradition was tyranny, as if all education was coercion ; as if the fact that you were told a thing

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when you were young was in itself sufficient evidence against its truth. Now, why? It is easy, of course, to put up a cynical case for such a misrepresentation ; to suggest that parents only teach their children myths which will make for good behaviour in childhood, priests will only teach the laity doctrines which will keep the laity from getting out of hand. But do we really believe that? Mr de Vere Stacpoole, for example, writes : “ I had the feeling that the threat of eternal punishment for finite sins was a bogey put up to frighten me, not by God, but by my elders and betters. In the course of many years I have not altered this opinion, substituting for elders and betters the heads of the churches of the past ”, and so on. Now, did Mr Stacpoole really think, and does he really think, that his parents were lying to him when they told him about hell? Did he really not credit them with sufficient honesty of mind to believe what they taught, and teach what they believed? And if the people who told him about hell themselves believed in hell, what becomes of the ulterior motive with which he credits them? What is the sense of telling us that priests have invented dogmas “ for their own purposes ”, without stopping to consider whether the priests who preached those dogmas believed them or not? I repeat, it is a kind of conspiracy-mania, this suspicion of all we were ever taught ; it has no roots in common sense or in logic. We have made a dogma of a dogmatism, we have a creed of creedlessness, and our protest against formulas is, in this age of catchwords, the most stereotyped formula of the lot.

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Are we really reduced to the position of having to conceal from our children the fact that a God exists, lest, hearing the statement in their childhood, they should call it a dogma and revolt from it? Are we to lock up our prayer-books when we come home from church on Sunday, and put away the parish magazine on a high shelf, so that innocent minds shall not be tarnished by its influence? Are we to dismiss the chauffeur when he says "Good God!" in the presence of the family? That is the corollary which we should logically draw when Miss West tells us that she would not, if she could, tell us why she believes in God, because that would save us the trouble of finding it out for ourselves ; or when Mr Hannen Swaffer assures us that all revelation is a revolution, and all true religion a reaction from the beliefs of the generation which went before. In Russia, they are treating Christianity in that sort of way. Can we really hope that the rising generation there will have a profound belief in the traditions of orthodoxy, as the result of the contrary dogmas with which it has been imbued in childhood?

You cannot really break away from antiquity ; it has always been there first, and muddled the trail of truth with its own footmarks. Mr Bennett is only, after all, a Kantian, and Mr Drinkwater is only reviving the philosophical errors of Descartes. The question which it remains for the human intellect to decide is whether it has to go on, generation after generation, making the same limited number of guesses, working up those guesses into a system, and then rejecting

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them again because they are a system, or whether there exists such a thing as a revelation—that is, a series of truths, some of them necessarily obscure to our minds, whose authenticity is guaranteed to us, once for all, on the authority of an Informant more than human. And this whole idea of revelation is passed over, in complete silence, by the symposiasts. For the alleged revelation came to us nineteen hundred years ago, and must labour, therefore, under the imputation of being Victorian.

III

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It is a symptom lamentably characteristic of our time and clime that none of the authors who were asked to write on *My Religion*—not even Mr Compton Mackenzie—thought of putting and answering the question, what religion is.

Let us not fall into the same error. Religion is, by its derivation, something that ties a man down, restrains him. Whether it be true or false, it is an influence which prevents a man from behaving in a way in which he might otherwise have behaved, and does so in the name of some higher power with whose authority he dare not palter. The idea is most easily grasped if you confine your attention to the taking of oaths. A savage king has been defeated in battle ; and the conqueror, to avoid the necessity for continued vigilance, wants to bind down the conquered enemy to certain conditions ; he must undertake (let us say) never to pass over a certain stream in armour or with armed followers. The beaten man, influenced by the discomfort which arises from having somebody else's foot on your neck, asserts readily enough that he will never do anything of the kind. That is all very well ; but the point is, will he? It is, at present, the determination of his mind not to do so, but other determinations of his mind are liable to succeed when he

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has been allowed to get up from the floor. What reason is there for trusting his present determination any more than his future determinations? Do not those subsequent determinations enjoy equal validity with the present determination, springing as they do from the same will? In short, if at any time the beaten man wants to change his mind, why not?

In these circumstances, the conqueror wishes to invoke the sanction of some higher power, not amenable to the dictation of the victim's caprice, which will guarantee the permanence of the existing resolution. At his dictation, therefore, the conquered man pronounces a formula by which he invites his gods to bring pestilence on his lands and plagues on his wife and children if at any time he goes back on the word he has passed. This done, he may get up; the keeping of the oath is now in safe hands, since the man who has taken it is liable to the possible vengeance, or at least to the ominous disapproval, of something outside himself and greater than himself; he is restrained, he is bound over; the oath which he has taken restricts the possibilities of his future behaviour. (This specialized sense of the word *religion* survives in our description of a monk or a nun as a *religious*, *i.e.* one whose observance of the Christian spirit is guaranteed, over and above the dictates of conscience, by an oath solemnly registered under divine sanctions.)

It does not strictly matter whether the powers which thus exert an outside influence on our conduct are conceived as

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benevolent or malevolent, as personal or impersonal, provided that they can enforce their rights by punishments inflicted here or hereafter. On the other hand, if they are conceived as personal and benevolent, it is not strictly necessary that we should expect rewards or punishments from them ; a sense of shame or of loyalty may make us unwilling to offend them, and thus supply a sanction which is external to ourselves. St Chrysostom, I think it is, tells us that we ought to avoid sin even when we are alone, out of reverence for the presence of our Angel Guardian ; such reverence is religious ; it puts a restraint on us in despite of ourselves. But a morality, however scrupulous, which is based on purely natural considerations, whether it be on our conception of social good, or on self-respect, or on human respect, or on sentiment, or on æsthetic distaste for certain courses of action, is not to that extent religious ; for the appeal it makes is at best only an appeal from our lower nature to our higher nature, not an appeal from ourselves to something higher than ourselves. Religion, in fact, if it is to keep the sense of its derivation, is not something which I have got hold of, but something which has got hold of me.

It is in this sense that the moderns use the word religion, when they are discussing orthodox Christianity ; they complain that our religion does not tie us Christians down as successfully as it ought to. Thus Mr Bennett : “ I think Christianity as a force might have effectively survived if it had not for centuries so notoriously forgotten the teaching

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of its own Founder". Thus Mr Beresford : " I have never seen that ethic practised by the members of any Christian community with which I have been associated ". Thus Mr Stacpoole : " This teaching is in the Bible, but in some extraordinary way it was never set free from the churches and conventicles till recent times, and then it was released, I suspect, not by the parsons, but the congregations, redeemed by education from the deadening clutch of formalism and creed ". I am not going to discuss here the unfairness of the implication which these criticisms usually make, namely the implication that if the doctrines asserted by the Christian religion were true, the moral sanctions which it pleads would invariably, or almost invariably, prevent anybody from ever doing anything contrary to the spirit of Christ. A cog-wheel is a cog-wheel, even if it slips nine times in every ten revolutions ; and a religion is a religion, even if its adherents, nine times out of ten, do the wrong thing. I am only commenting on the fact that the symposiasts, when they talk about *our* religion, habitually assume that it is meant to act as a check upon conduct, and was introduced into the world for no other purpose.

But when they come to talk about *their* religion, these same authors assume, it would appear, a quite different definition of the whole subject. Religion, in the sense in which they are now using it, no longer consists in a system of sanctions which prevents them, in their own despite, from acting in accordance with their natural appetites ; it is merely a sort of added grace, a bloom upon their otherwise

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blameless characters, which inspires them with great thoughts, makes them feel happy about the prospect of death, and consoles them for all the tragedies of life. In fact, if I may put it somewhat crudely, your modern man does not write : “ Up to the age of forty I was without any religion, and therefore felt no compunction about beating my wife ; then I began to look about for a religion, and found the great secret that God was really inside me, and since then I have not beaten my wife nearly so hard or so often ”. He writes : “ At the age of forty, having given up beating my wife because something told me that the action was anti-social, I began looking round for a religion. And then . . . ” etc. etc. He does not look upon religion as a workaday affair which has to enter into the minor complications of life ; it is a transient inspiration which visits him in certain moods of spiritual awareness, and in some obscure way satisfies him while it does so.

It looks, then, as if religion in its accepted sense were something wider and fuller than the mere check upon conduct which its derivation guarantees. And indeed it is inevitable that it should be so. For an effective check upon conduct implies a law which is outside yourself, and you cannot recognize the existence of that law without making an intellectual judgment ; from the first, then, religion must contain an element of intellectual assent. To submit your will to a law outside yourself which has no intellectual meaning for you is to live the life of a vegetable. If you are to regulate your conduct by supernatural sanctions you

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must have at least the beginnings of a creed, at least the glimmerings of a theology.

And this intellectual recognition of something other than yourself which is *ex hypothesi* something higher than yourself involves a fresh departure in its turn. To believe, with your mind, in some supernatural Influence brings with it the instinct to be, somehow, in emotional relations with it. Even if you are the Caliban of the island, to believe in the existence of Setebos produces its emotional reactions, though they may only take the form of a fear which has in it but the germs of reverence. I call this an instinct ; I do not mean that it is not theoretically possible to have a religion which would exclude any *effective* emotional relation with the other world. A savage who believes in Juggernaut may be led, through his belief, to observe certain laws of conduct, yet without any notion that Juggernaut hears human prayer or values human worship. He may be frightened of Juggernaut ; but it is another question if Juggernaut cares whether he is frightened or not. But in most forms of known religion worship is paid to some higher power with the idea that such worship has a value. And this emotional attitude which we call worship brings to certain people a sense (which may be real or illusory) that they are in touch with, in relation with, or even in communion with, those powers to which the worship is addressed.

Thus the ordinary Christian finds in his Christianity a threefold satisfaction of his nature. He finds satisfaction

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for his intellect—not in the sense that his religion makes it any easier for him to understand what is the relation between force and matter, or how the chicken comes out of the egg, but in the sense that he no longer regards the order of things around him as merely fortuitous, or merely malignant. He finds satisfaction for his will—not in the sense (heaven knows) that he always lives up to the highest promptings of his religion, whether you take him in the individual or in the mass, but in the sense that he is able to plan his conduct so as to meet the approval of Somebody Else ; he is not simply making it up for himself as he goes along. And he finds satisfaction for his emotional nature—not in the sense that he has found a substitute for human loves and human loyalties, but in the sense that he has a fixed Centre, whither his whole being gravitates when it is at its best and freest ; he has an aim.

Does the religion of the symposiasts include all these three elements? I doubt it.

There are persons living—and writing—to whom such a satisfaction of the nature seems not worth achieving. Thus Mr Bertrand Russell contributed a single article to *Everyman*, in which he asked and negatived the question “Is religion desirable?” The usual argument of religious people is, he says, as follows : “I and my friends are persons of amazing intelligence and virtue. It is hardly conceivable that so much intelligence and virtue could have come about by chance. There must therefore be someone at least as intelligent and virtuous as we are, who set the cosmic

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machinery in motion with a view to producing us". Let us notice again what I was saying in the last chapter, that the symposiasts are always incapable of stating any view held by their opponents without caricaturing it. The argument is not, and Mr Russell knows that it is not, what he states. It is not the fact that we are so extremely intelligent, it is the fact that we are intelligent at all, which makes a difficulty for the materialist. Nor does it matter in the least, to the argument, whether the people who use it are virtuous people, or steeped in every imaginable crime. The point is that they are capable of making moral judgments, and of our moral judgments the materialist has no plausible explanation to offer. However, one sees what he means; the philosopher is writing down to the level of us plain men, and he thinks we shall not notice if he throws in a little satire while he is about it. What he means is that the phenomena of intellect and will are commonly brought forward as an objection to the materialist philosophy. We claim that in explaining the facts of existence you must take account not only of matter but of spirit, since spirit is equally part of our experience; and that, on the law of interpreting the lower always in terms of the higher, you must make Spirit, not matter, the ultimate principle.

Mr Russell's answer to this argument is a singular one. "The Universe is large, yet, if we are to believe Eddington, there are probably nowhere else in the Universe beings as intelligent as men. If you consider the total amount of matter in the world and compare it with the amount forming

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the bodies of intelligent beings, you will see that the latter bear an almost infinitesimal proportion to the former. Consequently, even if it is enormously improbable that the laws of chance will produce an organism capable of intelligence out of a casual selection of atoms, it is nevertheless probable that there will be in the Universe that very small number of such organisms that we do in fact find". In short, you cannot have all these multitudinous atoms knocking about in space without producing, once and again, a being who is capable of becoming the object of his own thought, the spectator of all time and existence.

I think it is very interesting to find Mr Russell writing like that, because to me the whole force of the same argument is exactly the other way. The more worlds Professor Eddington discovers for us, the more remarkable do I find it that Nature should have produced this one freak, and only this single one ; nothing else, as far as our experience can show, which even remotely resembles us. If it were only a question of degree, it might be different. If, as we went about the world, we occasionally lighted on a rather artistic hyena or a moderately virtuous hippopotamus, then I should agree that the appearance of Man might be reasonably explained by a law of averages. But the fact that this whole world of conscious experience, having the whole Universe for its object, should be at the disposal *of one, and only one*, among all the creatures in existence, that does seem to me really staggering, really significant. That among all these innumerable worlds there should be only one or two, and

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probably only one, in which life is possible; and that among all the types which exist in it one should have turned out its Michael Angelos and its Spinozas, while all the other animal types, which had an equally fair start, have not yet learned to light a fire or weave a rope between them—all that seems to me a very odd coincidence.

However, it is perhaps a matter of temperament. I find it hard to explain why intelligence is so rare; Mr Russell is impressed by the fact that it exists at all. But surely Mr Russell must have thought rather poorly of the intelligence to be found among the readers of *Everyman*. It was, I suppose, just carelessness when he wrote: "Even if it is enormously improbable that the laws of chance will produce an organism capable of intelligence out of a casual selection of atoms, it is nevertheless probable that there will be in the Universe that very small number of such organisms that we do in fact find". Mr Russell does, presumably, believe that chance working on a selection of atoms is responsible for the Universe as we know it. And when we take his sentence out of tangle, we find he has said: "Of course, it is enormously improbable that there should be any intelligent organisms at all, but it is quite probable that there should be one or two". One understands what a busy man Mr Russell must be, but—why do they all think religion is not worth writing sensibly about?

He thought so poorly of our intelligence, that he supposed we should not be able to detect the words in which he has begged the whole question. I mean the words

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“capable of intelligence”. If the police were to discover a human body in Mr Russell’s Saratoga trunk, he would not be able to satisfy them with the explanation that, among all the innumerable articles of luggage in the world, it is only natural that there should be some few which are large enough to contain a body. They would want to know how it got there. And the argument which Mr Russell ought to have been meeting, and knew that he ought to have been meeting, was that spirit, which cannot be explained in terms of matter, must somehow be the explanation of the Universe. You may show what atomic groupings are necessary in order that life may emerge out of matter, sentience out of life, or intellect out of sentience ; but you cannot thereby reduce life, let alone sentient life and intellectual life, to terms of matter ; you have only succeeded in tabulating the material coefficients of things which are not themselves material. I do not mean that Mr Russell would not be able to put up a case against this argument ; I only complain that he simplified his task by pretending to misunderstand what the argument was ; by assuming that it was merely physical when as a matter of fact it is metaphysical.

Even so, he has only met one argument for theism, which he arbitrarily describes as the usual one. All others he airily dismisses with the formula : “ I leave on one side the old metaphysical arguments, since religious apologists have thrown them over ”. Have they? It is possible that in the philosophical clique with whose atmosphere Mr Russell is familiar these arguments are not discussed. But—what is

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this? "I believe that there is a God, if only for the reason that I can imagine no other explanation of a marvellous, scientifically-ordered, and law-controlled Universe. This argument is called 'the argument from design', and it strikes me as a pretty good argument. There is, however, another argument for the existence of God which, for me, is more cogent. . . . The universality of conscience, together with the broad uniformity of its influence on conduct, convinces me far more than anything else that it must have been implanted in us by a Creator". Are these the words of St Thomas Aquinas? Why, no; they are the words of Mr Arnold Bennett. Doubtless Mr Bennett is not a professionally-trained philosopher, but nobody pretends that he is a fool. And if Mr Russell wants to convince us all that religion is nonsense, he will have to put his case rather more elaborately; that is clear.

The extraordinary thing to me, far more extraordinary than Mr Russell's objections to theism, is the nature of the reply put forward in the succeeding issue by Mr Max Plowman. He admits, for whatever it may mean, that "it is precisely because what is often called religion is neither honest mentally nor vital emotionally that the religion of the churches in the west is tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine". He then proceeds to deal his own knock-out blow. He is apparently one of those who believe "the search for God in the world of fact to be atheistical folly". But, he says, "Mr Russell might have saved himself a fruitless and depressing journey had he considered the

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simple words *God is Love*. . . . Mr Russell believes in the intelligence. I suspect he therefore finds the truth *God is in me and I in Him*, intellectually incomprehensible. Yet what are we here for if not to discover that? . . . I believe that to love is to be in God, and that to cease from love is to be exiled from God—just in so far (and it is not very far) as that is possible. For I am confident that to cease from love is to cease from life. . . . We live and move and have our being in the element that brought us to birth. So that is why I believe in God, and why I believe in religion which is the worship of God. . . . Directly I love anything I cease from pure intellectual life, and by entering the world of sensuous and, finally, spiritual apprehension, acknowledge the insufficiency of intellect for the enjoyment of what I most desire”.

What on earth is all this rigmarole about? If we are not to search for God in the world of fact, where are we to look for Him? Or does Mr Plowman mean the world of matter, and if so, why not say so? Does Love not exist in the world of fact? And if so, what right has Mr Plowman to search for God in it? That the intellect is insufficient for the enjoyment of what we most desire, is patent to anybody. But because the intellect is insufficient for its enjoyment, does that prove that the intellect is insufficient for its discovery? No doubt mysticism has experiences of its own, which cannot be readily enshrined in an intellectual formula. But does the fact that Mr Plowman loves God release Mr Russell and the rest of us from any curiosity whether God

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exists or not? What he has done is to adopt the Christian maxim, *God is Love*, to reverse it, quite arbitrarily, into the pagan maxim, *Love is God*; and then to argue that, because love is an emotion, and consequently no intellectual formula can exhaust its content, there is no need to argue about the existence of God at all. But what has Mr Plowman really proved? Nothing more than that the emotion of love, whether it be love of God or love of a woman or love of a five-pound note, is something unanalysable in terms of atoms and space-time. If he is prepared to deify this instinct, he is welcome to do so, but it is hard to feel that the cause of any theology is benefited by the process.

I should not have delayed so long over this grotesque piece of rhetoric, were it not for the uneasy suspicion that most of the authors who write about their religion would have been driven to similar shifts if they had had to come out and meet Mr Bertrand Russell in the open. It is instructive to note that, in so far as they are typical of the popular instinct, atheism is still bad form. Mr Zangwill classes the ultra-pietists and the atheists together as "brainless"—a hard name for Mr Russell. According to Mr Drinkwater, "It is true that a few people profess a positive unbelief, atheism. Whether they could maintain the position under severe self-scrutiny is, at least, doubtful, and in any case the position is a rare one". And it is part of Mr Walpole's creed that "a completely materialistic explanation of our life on this planet accounts less and less for many of our inner experiences". Yet, as far as I can see,

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none of the authors in any of the symposia, except Mr Bennett, gives any intelligible account of why he believes, or any reason why any other living creature should believe as he does.

This point will, I hope, become clear enough as we proceed ; and it will be time enough to discuss the bearings (and probable effects) of this new theological method later on. For the present, I will content myself with observing that a religion which shrinks from intellectual inquiry and takes refuge in emotional affirmation can at best only be a weak and lopsided religion. For it does what Christianity has always been accused of doing ; it treats the intellect, the reason, as something to be feared and distrusted ; as if this, too, were not the gift of God. Not, indeed, that it would have the astronomers stop astronomizing or the biologists biologizing ; it has nothing of the Tennessee spirit. On the contrary, it has much to say in praise of the scientist, and much in condemnation of a (quite imaginary) attitude of antipathy towards it on the part of the orthodox. But it blasphemes our divine gift of reason by treating it as if it had no say at all in the affairs of the soul ; as if it were a mere hewer of wood and drawer of water to provide for our material needs. It is not allowed to enter into the discussion of religion, on the ground that religion is something too holy for it. The baldest illustration of this is the attitude of Mr Walpole in his contribution to the series *Where are the Dead?* Sir Arthur Keith, as we shall see, set the ball rolling in that controversy by roundly denying the

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possibility of human survival after death. And Mr Walpole writes : " Suppose that to-night it were definitely proved to me beyond shadow of doubt that Sir Arthur Keith's words were true, even then I should not believe it ".

There is a certain attractive plausibility about the comic nigger who says, when his companion plays him a tune, " Boy, even if that was good I wouldn't like it ". But to say, " Even if that were true I wouldn't believe it " is to talk nonsense at the best ; it is also to announce one's intention, in imaginary circumstances, of committing a sin. It is our duty, and our first duty, to accept any truth which demonstrates itself convincingly to reason. I once wrote, satirically, that the age seemed to be passing into a condition which might be described as the Higher Cretinism ; and upon my word, if Mr Walpole's attitude is a common one, it seems to me that my title was justified. It was open to Mr Walpole to point out, as Mr Lynd, for example, pointed out, that a view such as that held by Sir Arthur is strictly incapable of proof ; no set of observations could be imagined which could possibly establish it as more than a probability. It was open for him to say that however convincing any proof of annihilation might *seem* to him to be, he would nevertheless, such was the strength of his interior conviction, feel sure that the argument, for all its plausibility, must depend on some false calculation. But he is not content with that ; he says that he would go on believing in personal immortality even if he knew there were no such thing. And that is not religion ; it is telling a lie.

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Let us observe, then, a curious inconsistency between the attitude of the symposiasts when they assert, and their attitude when they deny. When they are dealing (say) with the doctrine of the Atonement, they tell us it is so unreasonable that they could not possibly accept it ; it would revolt their consciences to have to do so. They appeal, that is, to the logic of argument. But when Mr Bertrand Russell trains on them the artillery which they have themselves been directing at us, then they tell him, with superior scorn, to go and mind his logarithms ; all this intellectual stuff, they say, means nothing to them. . . . And let them not try to rebut the dilemma on me. I could not believe in the doctrine of the Atonement if it were proved to me to be untrue. Not for me the cast-iron faith of Mr Walpole.

It is an inconsistency only in appearance. The modern world is brain-shy ; that is the trouble. It dislikes the doctrines of the Church for precisely the same reason for which it dislikes the argumentations of Mr Russell, because it takes trouble, demands a real exercise of the speculative intellect, to expose the latter or avoid the cogency of the former. And it prefers its dreams.

IV

THE BY-PASS TO DAMASCUS

It must not be supposed, from what has been said in the last chapter, that all the contributors to these symposia, apart from those who were committed to some form of organized religion, turned their backs upon the human reason at the very outset of their inquiry. We have already seen that Mr Bennett approaches the motives of credibility in a perfectly business-like way ; he gets roughly as far as Kant, and he only parts company with the ordinary Christian apologist when incuriosity disinclines him to consider whether there has in fact been a historical revelation of any kind. The spiritualists, represented by Sir Oliver Lodge and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, go further than this ; they admit a revelation, only not ours ; and their beliefs are based on hearsay, and consequently on faith, just as ours are. They part company with us only because they refuse to consider the question of "extrinsic credibility" ; the question, I mean, whether the sort of intelligences from whom their information is supposedly derived can or can not be trusted to tell the truth.

But most of the symposiasts reject, as we have seen, the very notion of building up a structure of rational argument as the preliminary to faith ; most of them reject, either

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openly or by implication, the spiritualist gospel. Mr Beresford records his "examination and rejection of the phenomena of spiritualism, so far as the evidence for actual messages from the dead is concerned"; Israel Zangwill refers to "dear old Conan Doyle's fantasies"; Henry Arthur Jones "will not go out of his way to seek for" evidence from the dead of their continued existence. If they use the term *revelation* at all, it applies only to an internal revelation; to some kind of mystical experience which they have had, or think they have had, and expect the public, apparently, to take on trust. We may be pardoned, perhaps, for devoting rather close attention to the account which they give of their symptoms.

Mr Walpole found that during the War, when he was attached to the Russian armies, he felt an unexpected attitude towards physical death: "Again and again it was impressed on me, whether I wished it or not, that the cessation of bodily life did not mean the cessation of spiritual life". After the second year of the War a fresh experience is recorded: "I was conscious in myself of the existence of some other life besides my physical one". The expression is confusing; it is impossible to add two and two to make four without being conscious of a life in oneself which is not a physical one, if we use "physical" in the sense in which it is used by modern speech. It looks rather as if Mr Walpole had gone back to the days of the Montanists, and were distinguishing the "pneumatic" enlightenment of the soul from the operations of the

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“physical” or natural reason. He means that he finds himself thrown into a certain emotional attitude, distinguished from other emotional attitudes by the fact that there has been no sensible counterpart, even in imagination, to excite it ; that it comes to him unbidden, and indeed is not driven off by any attempt to rationalize it away ; it is “simply there”. He does not tell us precisely what form the emotional attitude takes, but he seems to imply that it is one of confidence, which extends itself to facing what lies beyond the grave. He does not, I take it, imply that he is conscious of a whole new set of faculties, over and above the ordinary faculties of his nature ; he only means that his ordinary faculties react in an extraordinary way, without any apparent natural stimulus.

Did this “second life” influence his actions in any way? With great frankness, he assures us that he does not think so. “I was not on the whole a better man because of it ; my good actions sprang in the main from social or personal causes—because I did not wish to hurt someone’s feelings, because I was afraid of public opinion, or because I was afraid of myself”. Mr Walpole’s self-analysis is rather baffling ; “to be afraid of public opinion” is a primary motive, operating directly, but a low one ; whereas the desire to spare other people’s feelings is a high motive, but a secondary one ; *i.e.* you can press the question and ask “Yes, but why did you *want* to spare other people’s feelings?”. And “to be afraid of oneself” may mean anything or nothing. But it is clear that as far as he could

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tell Mr Walpole's new religion did not prove to be a religion in the derivative sense of the word (as explained in the last chapter); did not restrain him from actions hitherto habitual, or urge him towards actions hitherto unfamiliar. It did not externalize itself in any way; it was "simply there". He noticed certain changes in himself; things became interesting to him that had never been interesting to him before; he wanted more time for silence and quiet; but such experiences, after all, are common to people who have just turned the corner into middle life.

And if the "second life" did not affect his actions, it is hard to see that it affected his opinions either. His *credo* at present is, he thinks, that one ought to be absolutely tolerant of other people's spiritual discoveries; that a materialistic explanation of the Universe does not account for our inner experiences; and that "the teachings of Christ, stripped of the dogmas others have put on them, apply with amazing wisdom and knowledge to modern conditions". In a word, he is not a materialist, and he believes in our Lord's teaching in accordance with the dogmas which he himself has put on it; intellectually, he is very much in the position of most modern agnostics, who have never had any experience of a "second life" at all.

Now, it would be impertinent for me to offer any personal comment on these "consolations" (as we Catholics would call them) which Mr Walpole has received, or thinks he has received; I am only concerned with them so far as they might serve to refute the contentions of a materialist. And

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I confess that I cannot think they go very far. The critic would suggest, I fancy, that after all Mr Walpole is growing into middle age, and that his emotional nature has very possibly been starved ; that the Christian fables which he learned in his youth took more hold upon his imagination than he knew, and that he has begun to want (unconsciously) some compensation for the loss of them ; that, in the twilit region of our psychic nature, to want a thing passes easily enough into thinking you have got it. In short, that Mr Walpole thinks his experiences objective, because he finds they come to him unbidden ; but this, after all, does not prove they have any objective validity ; it only proves that they spring from obscure roots which are below the level of consciousness.

Miss Rebecca West, who is not autobiographical in her treatment, nevertheless adopts the same starting-point as Mr Walpole. After witnessing the death, she says, of a parent or someone beloved in life : “ One perceives that he is not ceasing to exist, but passing into another universe ”. And the other universe in question is “ a universe of greater beauty than this. Of that one is made aware by an intuition which tells us constantly throughout life that there are certain actions we perform and emotions which we feel which, though they may not be injurious or repellent, and may indeed be pleasurable and harmless, are limited to this universe ”. In fact, the two certainties with which she starts are a confidence in survival after death, which is presumably a personal survival, and an instinctive feeling that some of

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our activities here cannot follow us into the world beyond. She goes further than this ; she says that just so far as these inferior interests predominate in one's life " one will perish with this universe ". She instances " a man who spends his whole life in playing some game like tennis or chess ", and " a county hostess who spends her whole life in trivial social activities ". But, she says, " there are other actions and emotions, of greater nobility and intensity, which print through this universe and make an impression on that other universe "; for example " anyone who warmly loves anyone else ; anyone who creates good art or sound thought, anyone who achieves courage or generosity, anyone who does any work well "—I do not know whether this last category would include professional footballers.

The sort of instinct to which she refers is indeed not an unknown one.

The soul, doubtless, is immortal, where a soul can be discerned.
Yours, for instance ; you know physics, something of geology,
Mathematics are your pastime ; souls shall rise in their degree ;
Butterflies may dread extinction—you'll not die, it cannot be !
As for Venice and its people, merely born to bloom and drop,
Here on earth they bore their fruitage, mirth and folly were the
crop.

What of soul was left, I wonder, when the kissing had to stop ?

One notices the difference ; how the Victorian whom Browning represents as the speaker regards brain as the immortal stuff, while Miss West condemns the chess-player to extinction and gives the lover a fresh lease of life. But—

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Browning was only putting a point of view ; Miss West is holding to our heads something suspiciously like a “ dogma ”. We must be pardoned for asking the question ; but how are we to be quite certain that Miss West is right ?

I have called it a “ dogma ” in the popular sense ; a dogma in the true sense it is not, for there is no sort of agreement about it. Nobody at all agrees with the main idea, as far as I know, except one imaginary character in *A Toccata of Galuppi's*, and even he gets it all different. The pagans, when they discussed a future life at all, seemed to hope that there would be room in it even for our trivial activities :

Quæ cura nitentes

Pascere equos, eadem sequitur tellure repostos.

Christian theology maintains that all men will rise again. So does Spiritualism ; and I seem to remember, though my memory may be at fault, that Mr Vale Owen held out some hopes of “ spiritual tennis ”. No, it is not a dogma, it is an immediate delivery of Miss West's consciousness. “ These certainties of mine cannot be proved by any logical process ; but I do not find this in the least disturbing, for it is not necessary that they should be. I am sure enough of them ”. And she proceeds to take out of our mouths the objection we were just going to raise, carrying the War with great daring into the enemy's country. “ The only use of any logical proof would be to convince other people of their reality, and that I do not want to do ; for I am certain that everybody has the same chance of receiving these intuitions

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that I have ". You see the idea? The old prophets used to say "Thus saith the Lord", and thundered denunciations against those who did not believe them. Miss West has a far simpler method; if we do not agree with her, she tells us to go away and hunt for intuitions—she does not tell us how. Just so the mathematical usher would send us back to our places to do the sum over again. She is sure, and so could we be, it seems, if we would only take the trouble.

And how is she sure that we could be sure? For a very simple reason. "Were I the only person, or one of a restricted number of persons, who could receive (these intuitions), then this would be such an unjust cosmos that I would lose all interest in it and seek annihilation by confining myself to the actions which perish with this world". In fact, we have got to agree with her; if not she will turn sulky and stop playing—or rather she will start playing chess and tennis. But she has still better munitions in store for us. "I should be afraid to convince anybody else of the reality of my intuitions; for, as the human animal is above all things indolent, he would probably accept my proof as an assurance that life has a meaning, and would refrain from seeking his own revelation, which alone can give him that assurance in a form suited to the individual needs of his own soul". Woe is me, if I preach the gospel, says this new form of prophecy. I am quite sure that life has a meaning, but I am not going to tell you why, because that would save you the trouble of finding out for yourselves. The Riddle of the Universe, you see, has to be

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solved by each of us ; and each of us must guarantee that his solution is his own unaided work.

Personally, I do think that life has a meaning, though I am not always so certain about Miss West. I believe various other things—for example, that the Bishop of Rome is infallible in matters affecting faith or morals. If I said to Miss West “ I am sure that the Bishop of Rome is infallible. This is an intuition, and if you have not got the same intuition you are a fool. Everybody must really have the same intuitions as I have myself ; it would be dreadfully unfair if they had not. Even if I did know how I got my intuition, I wouldn’t tell you, because you have jolly well got to find it out for yourself ”—if I said all this to Miss West, would she not be inclined to accuse me, a little, of cocksureness? No, if Mr Walpole left us something short of proof, Miss West has not succeeded in supplying the deficiency.

It may, however, be suggested that I am forgetting the terms of reference by which the authors cited were conditioned ; they were asked to write about *My Religion*, and the personal note will inevitably predominate in such contributions. I turn, therefore, to another series, *God in These Times*, published by the *Daily Express* in the June of 1929. Here Mr Drinkwater gives us a fresh avenue of approach to the “ second life ” which we have already been considering. In the middle of a conversation on some trivial subject, he says, “ without warning, all such things recede into a mist of unreality, and you realize that you are

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something of which all your knowledge is devoid of certainty, that you can define nothing of your nature, and declare nothing of your origins or destiny . . . you are suddenly as remote from your own comprehension as are the mysteries of space and eternity". We should expect that this sudden burst of recollection would fill us with a sense of fear, from which we should find it difficult to recover. But as a matter of fact we find that in quite a short time we have regained our normal mental equilibrium. "If my rational faculties were all, this could hardly be the case. . . . It must be because in these moods I am not merely rational in the sense that I am in contact with the routine of daily experience. Something more than my reason comes into operation when the mystery asserts itself. That something is a belief in God". And he adds, at the end of his article: "In those moments of contact with a reality that is beyond our rational processes we know—know, I think, as surely as we know anything—that there *is* a power through whom the full revelation will yet be made. And the power is God".

The experience to which Mr Drinkwater refers is certainly an uncanny one. We are so accustomed in our daily moods to take ourselves for granted, to direct our attention towards objects or considerations outside ourselves, that we feel it as a shock when our attention suddenly is directed not towards anything outside ourselves, but towards ourselves as thinking subjects. When we say "I want asparagus" we are thinking of asparagus; when we say "I think it will

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be a fine day to-morrow", we think of the weather ; we forget that there is a second term in the experience which our speech records, namely the " I " who wills, the " I " who thinks. It is very difficult for the ordinary person to reflect (as it were) the beam of his thought upon himself, the thinker, by a conscious act of will. But, as Mr Drink-water points out, it does sometimes occur to us without our own will, this experience of introversion, of having our attention directed back upon itself ; and it does, as he says, come as an odd shock to us. Something in the same way, when you are preaching or lecturing and are feeling tired, you may suddenly *hear* the sound of your own voice, and be surprised at the audition.

It is quite true that this experience has a great deal to do with religion. For the fact that man can become the object of his own thought, alone, as far as we know, among the creatures which people our visible universe, is our primary guarantee that intellectual life is something altogether different in kind from sensitive life ; assures us, therefore, of the existence of this thing called *spirit* which the materialists want to explain away. Only, this important truth is not a revelation which bursts upon us at the moment of any such experience ; it is a rational reflection, made in a cool hour.

But the shock with which the experience comes is apt to make us mistake it for something quite abnormal, or even supernatural. It was, I suppose, in some such flash that Descartes invented the slogan *Cogito, ergo sum*, and gave

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birth to that windmill-fight of Idealism which has side-tracked European thought ever since. Of himself, as thinker, he had a clear and distinct idea ; it came to him direct ; other people, other natural objects in the world, became known to him only in a mediate way, through ideas formed in his brain. The only other clear and distinct idea of which he was directly conscious was the idea of *God*. (Sir Francis Younghusband, as we shall see, would have added the idea of *England* ; but then Descartes had the misfortune to be born a foreigner.) And he believed that he had found a philosophy which would assert beyond cavil the existence of God ; instead of which his legacy to mankind has been a doubt whether anything exists at all, and whether any knowledge is valid.

To Mr Drinkwater the experience, instead of being the foundation of all rational process, presents itself as a supra-normal experience which lies outside the confines of reason altogether. And, having found something which he cannot quite explain on the lines of his ordinary reasoning, he proceeds (the symposiasts always do) to label it *God*. Mr Max Plowman cannot account for Love, so he calls it " God ". Sir Francis Younghusband finds that there is an instinct of activity which inspires all living creatures, and he calls it " God ". Henry Arthur Jones finds that scientists are talking a lot about Force, and he calls it " God ". But do we really get any further by these experiments in nomenclature, as long as we are prepared to identify the Supreme Being with the experience itself, instead of recognizing in

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him Something beyond and higher than the experience itself, from whom and through whom it comes?

True, Mr Drinkwater is not quite so explicit as the others ; he is content to say that this queer feeling which comes over him is, really, a belief in God. But this surely means, either that the experience to which he alludes is something far rarer and more mystical than he has succeeded in explaining, or else that his idea of "belief in God" is a singularly vague one. Still, for all the help Mr Drinkwater has given us, the whole object of religion appears to be nothing more than a state of mind.

Sir Francis Younghusband begins, as we have seen, with the consideration of something which is outside ourselves, namely the ceaseless activity which informs all living nature. But instead of deducing any argument from this, he once more invites us into the sanctum of our own inner experience, and tells us that we must find the explanation we are looking for in some moment of interior illumination. "Some", he says, "perhaps more than we think, do have an experience which shows them unmistakably what they seek. In some rare and treasured moment, when they are strung up to a state of finest sensitivity and are quickly receptive of the most delicate impressions, they become acutely aware both of the nature and of the power of that activity". And he goes on to tell us, as usual, that of course this is the sort of experience which cannot possibly be described, and therefore it is no use for us to ask him for more particular details about it.

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He does, however, give us some hint of the logical process involved. The people who have had the experience referred to have passed, it seems, beyond self-consciousness into world-consciousness. "Just as in ordinary times they are aware of the 'I' which is working through each of them, so now they have become aware of the vastly mightier 'I' which is actuating the Universe". In fact, if it is possible for a man to be directly aware of the self which is in him, why should it not be equally possible for him to be directly aware of that World-Soul which is the Pantheist's God?

It sounds cogent ; but I confess that I am sceptic enough to doubt whether, without a definitely supernatural interference, such as may be presumed to take place in ecstasy, it is possible to interpret one's mystical experiences at the moment when they are being experienced. Are we really to believe that, even in the most rare and treasured moments, you can be aware of yourself as the Universal Ego, and at the same time be conscious that you are being aware of yourself as the Universal Ego? Is it not the plain fact that people do get a queer feeling all over them, and afterwards, when they sit down to think about it, come to the conclusion that it must have been the Universal Ego they were conscious of? And in that case, are we very much further on? We still stop short at an incommunicable experience, which Sir Francis Younghusband thinks that he can interpret.

Even the writers who show a little more sympathy for traditional Christianity seem to make their approach to religion by the same path. Mr Ernest Raymond, for example,

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finds that there is something in him which “gives its constant assent to all that has been said about God by the experts in God (who are, let it be remembered, not the intellectual giants, but the spiritual giants)”, and he has “a strange feeling that that something is a higher, fuller, *wholer* entity than my paltry little reason, and very much nearer to the reality which lies behind this temporal and illusive world”. This sense of emotional reaction to supposed spiritual truths is, I imagine, common to most of us. Just as we gasp and are thrilled when we first read such lines as

Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides ;

so a thought in the pages of a devotional work will suddenly strike a responsive chord in us and for the moment carry us away. But I confess that the experience known as getting “lights” in your religious reading is to me a somewhat tenuous argument for the existence of God ; and becomes the more so when you read Mr Raymond’s list of spiritual authors, “Buddha, Plato, Christ, Plotinus, St John of the Cross, Shakespeare, Goethe, and Keats”. I had never thought, somehow, of Keats as an expert in God ; and I suspect that Mr Raymond’s lights in reading have a strong family resemblance to the merely emotional gasps which I alluded to above. I know that a kind of mystical eclecticism has become fashionable ; but if you use mysticism in a sense which includes Keats, you are doing a disservice to the cause of religion. For you are reducing your own

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religious experiences to the level of your most exciting thrills of literary appreciation. In these regions, a man can only speak for himself; to me, literary appreciation is one thing, and religious appreciation something intrinsically different. And in either case, what have you to show for it? Only a state of mind, and one for which the psychoanalyst will find a thousand ingenious explanations.

Mr James Douglas is more explicit in his claims; he wants to make "faith" a separate sense, a separate faculty of our being. "I am sure that faith is a supersense. To me it seems absurd to suppose that the five physical senses are the only senses which we possess. . . . There is a higher sense which transmits messages to the cortex of the brain, that marvellous recorder and decoder of signals". Yes, but what is it exactly, this sense of faith, and what is its proper object? "When our whole being is in a state of acceptance and surrender our sense of faith fills us with delight in the wonder of every cloud, every tree, and every flower". So far, it would appear to be a kind of grace which quickens our natural appreciation of natural beauty. Later on, we hear that our sense of faith "assures us that the Being whose handiwork is so inexhaustibly beautiful and sublime is not maleficent or malignant or indifferent". But does not this sound more like an inference than the direct delivery which we expect from one of the senses? My sense of sight can assure me that my bath-water is brown, but it cannot tell me my bath-water is so brown that there must have been rain in the peat-streams. If faith

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is a sense all by itself, then we should have a convenient account to give of all the symptoms we have been considering in the present chapter. But then, if it is really a sense, it can only record sense-impressions on the cortex of the brain, and it would remain the work of reason to digest and arrange the impressions among themselves, as in the case of the other senses. And when we propose to do that, there is an immediate outcry from all the symposiasts that reason has no right to tread upon such holy ground as this. So that faith remains no more valuable to us than the sense of hearing is to an idiot ; it begins and ends with an experience which may or may not be provoked by some outside stimulus, concerning whose nature (supposing that it exists) we must for ever remain ignorant.

The root error, curiously enough, which has given rise to all these extravagances of speculation is a legacy from the old, traditional, Protestantism. No question exercised our forefathers more in the time of the Protestant controversy, than the question whether the act of faith was (as we Catholics say) an act directed by the will but seated in the reason, or whether it lay outside the sphere of reason altogether. The modern Pantheist assures us that he, too, is making an act of faith. But when we ask " In what? ", he replies " Hush! It is not seated in the reason ".

V

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THE reader is now in a position to make up his mind whether or no the witness of the symposiasts inclines him to believe that Something exists outside the sphere of our common experience. We must proceed to consider whether the alleged existence of the Something involves the existence of a Somebody.

I have not dwelt much on the contribution made by Henry Arthur Jones to the *My Religion* series, because he belonged to an older generation than most of his colleagues. And it is perhaps worth while observing that, belonging as he did to an older generation which called things by their right names, he was not afraid to call himself a pantheist. "I do not understand", he says, "what is meant by a personal God. The phrase brings me up against a blank wall. So far as I can understand what is meant by it, it seems to me a contradiction in terms. When it is used, I recall the Psalmist's rebuke, *Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself, but I will reprove thee*". Perhaps it will be well to clear the ground for the present chapter by considering what it is that we mean and what it is that we do not mean when we talk of a personal God.

Nothing is more characteristic of the symposiasts than

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their habit of quoting Scriptural phrases and giving them a totally unscriptural meaning. Nobody in his senses can doubt that the author of that Psalm *did* believe in a personal God. If it comes to that, it takes a personal God to reprove anybody. And if the whole phrase is quoted, it becomes obvious at once that it is quite unconnected with the matter in hand. "These things hast thou done, and I held my tongue, and thou thoughtest wickedly that I was even such an one as thyself, but I will reprove thee, and set before thee the things which thou hast done". The wicked imagine that God does not punish sin, because he does not punish it immediately; he is not like us men, who resent an injury as soon as the injury is perpetrated. The wicked do not understand this, and, finding that they can sin with impunity for the moment, are encouraged to continue in their evil ways. But this state of things is not going to last; God is about to make himself known in vengeance. And this sentiment is solemnly quoted to show that God is not a Person; that "Force, Power, Spirit . . . are . . . the only reality"!

If I may imitate the author in his personal treatment of the subject, let me confess that I cannot understand, and have never been able to understand, what is meant by an impersonal God. What is Force? What is Power? What is Spirit? I have no knowledge of such things except as the functions of a personality. If an engine runs into a truck and smashes it, the only experiences which my senses guarantee to me are those of motion and impact; the idea

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of the engine having “ force ” in it I only derive, by a kind of metaphor, from my own experience when I hit my head against the ceiling. To suppose that the engine has any force in it which really belongs to it is the kind of mistake which could only be made by a savage. And I would say the same of any “ force ” which scientists have discovered or may hereafter discover in inanimate nature ; it may be described metaphorically as force, but it only becomes force properly speaking if you can think of it as force exerted *by someone*. So with the word *power* ; so, still more obviously, with the word *spirit*. There is only one spirit of which I have direct experience, and that is my own ; by a parity of reasoning, I recognize spirits in the other human beings who surround me. I have no experience whatever of impersonal spirits ; no experience, even, which enables me to conceive what an impersonal spirit could be like. More, I find that Man in proportion as he becomes civilized, in proportion as he grows away from his resemblance to the beasts, becomes more individualized ; is less influenced by herd instinct, less liable to the infectious enthusiasms of the mob. And that means, surely, that in proportion as men (who are the only spirits I know) realize their own nature, the more conscious they become of personality. Everything I know suggests to me that personality (whatever that means) is essential to a spirit (whatever I mean by that).

It is true that there are many accidental characteristics of personality which I have to think away before I can form any conception of that Spirit which is God. I only know

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of spirits which are united with bodies ; that is a limitation which I have to think away in order to arrive at the idea of a divine Being. I only know of spirits which are liable to the disturbances which we call passions ; these again I must think away. But these, as I say, are accidental characteristics ; I may not have met a spirit which lacks them, but there is no reason in thought why such spirits should not exist. Whereas the idea of personality, of self-conscious individuality, is so vital to my whole conception of the spirit nature that I cannot even think it away. A purely impersonal spirit is as unthinkable to me as a moral agent who has no will.

The reason why your modern Englishman is so easily taken in by the jargon of pantheism is that he is so little trained to distinguish with accuracy his own thoughts. He talks about himself as a spirit ; he also talks about “ the spirit of democracy ” ; and he has not examined his own consciousness sufficiently to realize that he is using the same word in two totally different senses. His own spirit is something which exists in the real order ; it is as much a piece of reality as the garden-roller on his front lawn. The spirit of democracy exists only in the ideal order ; it is something which is present to men’s minds, and exercises an influence on the world of fact only in so far as it becomes the determination of men’s minds. If God is a Spirit in the former sense, it is against all our experience that he should be impersonal. If he is a Spirit in the latter sense, then it makes no difference whether he exists or not ; *God* is only

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an idea in men's minds, and so long as it remains operative as an idea, there is no reason to worry whether it has objective existence or not.

Of this confusion, Sir Francis Younghusband provides us with an excellent instance. He asks himself whence this strange spiritual influence comes, that is his evidence of a world beyond ours. And he says he regards it "as issuing from a supreme Self, who is as intimately connected with the Universe as I am with my body, *or as England is with an Englishman*. . . . Just as I, an Englishman, can feel England expecting me to do my duty, so also can I feel the Genius or Spirit of the Universe—what we call God—expecting both England and myself . . . to strive with all our souls after what is best and noblest in life. So my faith in God is as real as my faith in England. . . . Of the existence of a God in me as England is in me, above me as England is above me, and as greater—far—than England as England is greater than me, I am as certain as I am of myself, or of England. And all three, God, England, and I, go together in inseparable and sacred communion".

It is difficult not to criticize the logic of this utterance, however we may admire its patriotic feeling. To say that the World-Soul is related to the world (or any part of it) exactly as the human soul is related to the human body, is to say one thing. To say that the World-Soul is related to the world (or any part of it) exactly as "England" is related to an Englishman, is to say something quite different.

The relation between soul and body is a thing unique in

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our experience, and probably unique in the whole of existence, because it is the direct union of two substances—the soul, which is an immaterial, and the body, which is a material, substance. Let it not be thought that I am begging the question here by importing the old-fashioned word *substance* into the dispute ; what I mean is that the soul exists in the real order of things ; you cannot explain it away, or analyse it away, into a mere abstraction. The soul of man has left its material mark on the planet ; it has thrown up the Taj Mahal and cut the Panama Canal. Abstractions are themselves the creatures of the mind ; and if the mind itself were an abstraction, we should have no abstractions at all.

But *England*, in the sense in which Sir Francis uses the word, *is* an abstraction ; it belongs to the ideal, not to the real order of things. In the real order of things, England is simply a large slab of earth and rock, dotted over with vegetable life and petrol-stations. It is not “in” Sir Francis, or in any of us. What *he* means by England is a complex of mental associations which are called up by the word—the history of the men who have lived on this slab of earth in the past, the national characteristics of the men who live upon it now, the destiny of their descendants. *England* in this sense is only an idea existing in men’s minds ; it has no substantial existence. Men may live for such an idea, fight for such an idea, and alter the whole course of the world’s history in doing so ; but it is still only an idea present to their minds, and has its effect only because

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their minds have entertained it and made for themselves a loyalty out of it. When you say "England is in me", you mean only that your mind, your character, and your affections have taken the particular stamp which is common to the men of this island.

Which, then, does Sir Francis mean? One or other of his parallels must be inexact. If he means that God is related to creation in the same way in which man's soul is related to the body, then he is a pantheist of the ordinary type. If he means that God is related to man merely as *England* is related to an Englishman, then he is not even a pantheist. For he has given us no reason to think that *God* has any real existence; *God*, we suspect, is just a convenient name for a set of moral ideals and aspirations which are present to man's mind and may alter the character of man's mind according as he entertains or rejects them; but he has no existence outside men's minds, any more than *England* has in the sense under discussion. Of that alternative Sir Francis seems to be unaware; and I fancy that in this he resembles many of his fellow-symposiasts.

How is it, exactly, that they think of God? Do they think of him as a Person, who, however intimate be his relations with the worlds he has made, however closely his influence penetrates and informs them, is yet an independent Being, who could exist without the Universe? Or do they think of him as a merely ideal entity, having existence only in men's minds, like *England*? Or do they

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think of him as something betwixt and between, having a real existence independently of our minds, and yet less than personal, a Life-Force, an Energy, an Activity, which pervades this world of material being, but does not transcend it? Let me implore the reader not to be taken in by the use of capital letters ; they are the modern Englishman's refuge from thought. If you are an atheist, you have only to refer to " That Non-Existent Being Whom men call God ", and all your reviewers will give you credit for a reverent attitude towards religion.

Mr Bennett's article leaves us in no doubt at all ; he is a genuine theist who stops short of believing in Revelation. It is true that he does not open felicitously : " Is there a God? Call this phenomenon a First Cause, a Supreme Being, a Creator—what you like ; God is a good name for it ". This rather off-hand attitude towards the Source of all existence might seem to presage an unorthodox treatment of the subject ; but our presentiment is wrong. Mr Bennett does believe in the existence of God, on the ground that such a belief is the only inference possible from the existence of uniformity in nature ; and further because " the universality of conscience, together with the broad uniformity of its influence on conduct, convinces me far more satisfactorily than anything else that it must have been implanted in us by a Creator who had a clear aim (whatever that aim may be) in the creation and slow evolution of his universe ". Mr Bennett's article was much criticized when it appeared ; but it seems to me we ought at least to be grateful to him

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for stating so clearly a position which has no affinities with pantheism.

Mr Walpole contrives to write five printed pages about his religion without either using the word *God* or giving us any sort of hint whether he believes in the existence of a Supreme Being or not. He may, of course, assume the fact, and assume that we assume it. But his article seems to imply so complete an engrossment with his own inner consciousness that it is hard to know whether the existence of objective supernatural facts would have any interest for him.

Miss West, as we have seen, belongs in the main to the same school; but she does suggest that "the creative spirit informing the world, which you may call God if you like, produced Christ to satisfy the spiritual needs of man", etc. It is very kind of her to say that we may call it God, but I should like to know what she means by a "creative spirit" before committing myself to the identification. Is it a mere abstraction, as when we say that the "spirit" of Elizabethan England produced Shakespeare? Is she merely personifying the laws which may be supposed to govern the historical evolution of the human race? Or does she really believe in a Divine Being, having an objective existence? And if so, does the word *creative* imply that he created the Universe? That he is omnipotent, she apparently does not hold; she believes in all efforts to extend the sphere of personal liberty, because "when we let people do what they like and say what they like we are giving the

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Divine a chance to express itself when it comes ". But is the Divine unable to express itself unless we go out of our way to let it express itself? If so, what on earth is the sense of calling it divine? On the whole, I am inclined to doubt whether Miss West has faced the problem.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was a theist before he was a spiritualist, on the ground that he "saw order in the Universe, and the existence of order postulates a central Intelligence ". This belief appears to be confirmed by his present tenets, as we shall see later.

Mr Phillips Oppenheim concludes that there seems to be no other religion left to-day for the thinking man (for whom he speaks) but to worship the unknown God through his fellows, fulfilling thereby a primitive and inherent instinct. But if the instinct, by itself, is sufficient motive for making us kind to our fellow-men, the existence or non-existence of an unknown God hardly comes into the question. And if the instinct demands some kind of philosophy to justify it, would it not be well to try and find out something about the unknown God? No light has flashed through the darkness here.

Mr Beresford tells us that "we may enlarge our conception of God to any extent, forsaking that early notion of him as a kind of jealous patriarch and judge, extraordinarily quick-tempered where his own rules are concerned, and assuming him as the essential spirit of the Universe ". Observe, once more, that Mr Beresford will not state an issue fairly. He gives a highly-coloured picture

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of (presumably) the way in which the Nature of God was understood by the Jews, rejects that, and rushes at once into a pantheist formula, without waiting to consider whether there is any half-way house between the two. He does not even discuss the Christian notion of God ; he does not cross swords with Mr Bennett ; he simply gives us the impression, in a vague way, that all the best people are being pantheists now. What Mr Beresford means by “assuming” God as the essential spirit of the Universe, I do not know ; does he mean that God *is* the essential spirit of the Universe, and therefore we are justified in using the term *God* in that sense ? Or does he mean that there is a lot of mysterious life-force about in the Universe, and on the whole it saves trouble to assume that this is some kind of a God ? From the remainder of his article, I should suppose that he limits the sphere of the divine operation to its influence on the human mind. He believes in “the divine principle in himself and in all mankind”. And he says that “if we could truly believe in God, not as a distant superhuman judge whom we must presently confront, but as inhabiting instantly and for ever our own mind, we should be incapable of acting unworthily”. That it should be possible to entertain both ideas, does not seem to occur to him ; he pushes contemptuously to one side all considerations which involve the thought of God’s Majesty and independent Being ; he compresses the whole of religion into a strong conviction which he calls faith—the conviction that God is always present to our minds. But whether God

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is so present (or ought to be so present) in reality or merely as a thought, does not seem to matter.

I may be misunderstanding Mr Beresford ; elsewhere, as we shall see, he professes a belief in the efficacy of intercessory prayer, which seems a hard doctrine to reconcile with any kind of pantheism. But if there is a misunderstanding, I cannot feel that it is entirely my fault. Mr Beresford preaches self-denial, because he finds it an idea common, roughly speaking, to all religions ; he thinks that the meaning of religion is “ the element of faith as a means to the practice of self-restraint ”. But, faith in what? And does it matter what? And does it matter whether there is any supernatural world, whether there are any supernatural powers in existence, as long as we can be persuaded to behave as if there were?

Mr Stacpoole's conception of the Christian conception of God has been already quoted (p. 25). It would seem that he does not believe in God as “ a magistrate and a school-master, a hanging judge and a loving Father ”, and it seems doubtful whether he believes in him as a Person. All this was “ the conventional creed of our forefathers ”, and it has given place to “ belief on lines more rational and understandable ”. If only they were! But the more deeply I study the writings of the symposiasts, the less can I detect either of rationality or of intelligibility. Mr Stacpoole goes on : “ Belief in good and evil, belief that in clinging to good, as far as in us lies, is the best form of the worship of the spirit of good ; and in avoiding evil, as far as in us lies, the

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best means of fighting the spirit of evil ". This is excellent advice, and we should all do well to profit by it. But why exactly is it more rational, and more understandable, to cling to good and avoid evil without any thought of a judgment hereafter than with it? I quite admit that we have within us an obstinate monitor, our conscience, which will not allow us to forget the difference between good and evil, however little we live up to our beliefs. But to say that blind obedience to conscience is rational or intelligible is possible, I should have thought, only to a man who has never heard a child ask " Why? ". And for that matter it is not only children to-day who are asking " Why? ". Large numbers of young men and women have nothing better than Mr Stacpoole's simple creed to live by ; but in my experience they do not seem very well satisfied with it.

And indeed, in his very next sentence Mr Stacpoole gives away his whole position : " I think very likely we who hold this simple faith are limited, even purblind ; that there are men so much above us that they have the power to come into closer touch with the Great Spirit ". The Great Spirit is apparently a substitute of some kind for the old-fashioned Deity of our nurseries ; he has not been mentioned before, but it now becomes clear that if you have certain spiritual gifts it is not necessary to remain satisfied with the simple faith outlined above ; the simple faith is only, after all, a second best. If we want to know more about the Great Spirit, Mr Stacpoole would refer us to the expert in such matters ; would refer us, let us say, to Miss Rebecca West.

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And she? She refuses to tell us anything, on the ground that she is no more of an expert than we are ourselves, if only we chose to be. Unlike Mr Stacpoole, she cannot believe that these spiritual intuitions are the preserve of a privileged caste ; if there were only a restricted number of persons who could receive such impressions, she would regard the cosmos as unjust, and throw up the sponge.

Let us imagine the position of a person who has lost belief in the theology of his childhood, and at the same time is distressed by the thought of his own continual moral failure. He goes to Mr Stacpoole : " That is all right ", he is told, " you just cling to good and avoid evil, and you will find it will make no end of difference ". " Yes ", the unhappy questioner admits, " but that is just what I find so difficult ; if I could only perhaps believe in a God. . . ." " Oh, you mean the Great Spirit? Well, of course there are people so much above you and me that they can get in touch with the Great Spirit. Why not go and ask Miss Rebecca West about it? " An interview is arranged with the celebrated authoress : " Mr Stacpoole says that you are in touch with the Great Spirit ; I wonder if you would be kind enough to give me some motive for abandoning such and such bad habits? " " Nothing simpler ; if you continue in those bad habits, you will lose your chance of immortality ". " Oh, shall I? That is very important. Now, what exactly makes you think that? " " It is an intuition ; I shall not tell you how I get it, because you can get it quite easily for yourself ". " But Mr Stacpoole said

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that this was only possible for a few elect spirits, and that ordinary people like myself must put our trust in a simple creed of good and evil". "Why, if I believed that", retorts Miss West, "I should stop being good myself!" And there the matter remains hung up: once more our modern prophets have only succeeded in darkening counsel.

Whether Mr Stacpoole's Great Spirit exists in the real or in the ideal order I do not know; presumably he is not personal. Mr Drinkwater, oddly enough, includes the Great Spirit among those "images" under which men used to represent to themselves the Unimaginable, in days less enlightened than ours. Nowadays, there are "immense numbers of people" who "seek no material symbol for their faith. To them the attempt to reduce to terms of reason a revelation that they perceive by a faculty that transcends reason seems purposeless". I do not know what to make of all this. What I really want to ask Mr Drinkwater is whether I may think of God under the symbol of Existence? Yet how can I say "God exists" without reducing a revelation to the crude terms of reason? And if God does not exist, or if I cannot know that he exists, Mr Drinkwater may keep his revelations, for I do not want them.

Mr Raymond at least concedes that a fine case can be made out for the probability of God's existence by logical proof. But only for the probability, after all. He cites "five lines of argument which have been familiar since the dawn of apologetics"; he cites them wrongly, omitting

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the argument from necessary existence, the argument from Motion, and the argument from Perfection, and substituting a proof from General Consent, a moral proof, and the Ontological argument, "which", he says, "is highly metaphysical and difficult". On this last point, I disagree with him. The ontological proof seems to me exquisitely simple, only unfortunately invalid ; it was invented by St Anselm, but the flaw in the argument has been pointed out by every theologian of consequence since. "God", said St Anselm, "possesses all perfections ; but existence is a perfection ; therefore God possesses existence ; therefore God exists". The fault lies in the transition from the ideal to the real order of things ; you attribute to God the *concept* of existence, and assume that in doing so you have given him real existence. And, curiously, Mr Raymond's own argument seems to be very much the same. The burden of his article seems to be : "How pleasant it would be if God existed ; therefore he must". This may perhaps establish a probability, but it clearly does not establish a certainty, for any other mind than Mr Raymond's own. And if the general consent of humanity gives me no more than a probable argument, I cannot be expected to derive complete intellectual satisfaction from the consent of Mr Raymond.

As a last hope, I turn to Mr James Douglas. Mr Douglas does, indeed, talk about a Creator, and presumably he means a personal Creator ; he hints, too, at the argument from design when he says that "the punctuality of the stars is a

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tremendous revelation of the invisible hand behind the visible universe". And he assures us that the Author of all the beauty in nature cannot be maleficent. But all this is, to him, not the basis of a metaphysical argument, but "the spiritual meaning of science". This, he says, "compensates us for the decline and decay of theology in its outworn forms of creed and dogma. Instead of vexing our minds with the metaphysics of men, we stay them on the mystery that irradiates every particle of matter", and so on. He cites an experience of his own in the South seas, in which he felt that the beauty of the sky under particular astronomical conditions made it impossible to disbelieve in God. In the last analysis, then, he puts his trust in a supersense. He thinks it important, not to know whether God exists, but to feel as if he existed.

And to the last, I am uncertain whether God is only a Name, or something more than a Name.

VI

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I WAS trying to show, at the beginning of my third chapter, that the notion of religion is, by derivation, the notion of something which conditions and circumscribes conduct, by reference to supernatural sanctions. You must do this, you must not do that—otherwise something will happen, in the supernatural order of things, which you do not want to happen. But, as we saw, religion cannot stop there, cannot be merely an expedient for regulating our conduct. We cannot in any reasonable sense believe in a God unless we have some idea of the position which he holds in the constitution of things. We cannot suppose that he is merely interested in human actions ; he must, surely, have some relation to, be in some degree responsible for, the tangled web of circumstance which surrounds us in these days of our mortality.

By instinct, man thinks of his own actions as unconditioned from without. He thinks of the evolution of his own species as the result of striving on the part of human wills, and nothing else. He is wrong psychologically, for all our actions are conditioned more than we know by influences not of our making. He is wrong, still more, theologically, for there can be no action, whether in the

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order of nature or in the order of grace, which is not subject, somehow, to the will of God. But Man reacts, by instinct, from the materialist philosophy which would tell him that he is only a blind pawn in some game which he does not understand. He is conscious that there is such a thing as action, and that action can be morally determined, and he will not allow himself to be argued out of this confidence by any sophistry of the intellect.

But he is conscious, too, that there are factors in the history of the world around him over which he has no control. Most primitively, he realizes that the support of his life depends upon the harvest. He may sow, he may reap, with the utmost care, energy, and efficiency, but the productiveness of his efforts will depend on suns, winds, and rains which he cannot unloose or call to heel. He is the victim of circumstance, even when he is preparing the daily necessities of life. Convulsions of nature, diseases, the inroads of animal life, reinforce the feeling of helplessness which the threat of famine has first inspired in him.

I have spoken, in a familiar phrase, of the web of circumstance, and in this web there is both warp and woof. On the one hand, Man is conscious, even when science is in its infancy, that natural effects follow natural causes. I have never been able to believe in that strange figment of anthropology—the savage who is supposed never to have grasped the idea of uniformity in nature, and attributes all occurrences whatever to the incalculable whim of his gods. If a volcano is in eruption, he may betake himself to prayer,

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but he also runs away—he knows that, in default of some miraculous intervention, the lava will flow downhill, not uphill ; and how does he know that, if he does not believe in the uniformity of nature? He does not sow wheat, and pray for barley to come up instead ; he does not shoot flint arrows into the air, and pray for a deer to come and stop them ; he watches, and depends on, the habits of his animal neighbours. No, we all know, and we always have known, that effects follow causes, and follow them regularly ; we all admit that (unless once and again miracle has intervened) the process of material nature has gone forward relentlessly, from cause to effect, ever since the worlds came into existence. In the strict sense, nothing *happens* ; everything proceeds, and has always proceeded, according to schedule.

But though this process of natural law is, viewed in itself, a continuous stream, admitting no hair's-breadth deviation, it becomes a chain of incidents, of catastrophes, where it crosses the lives of men. The earthquake, in obedience to mysterious principles which we have no power to trace, is bound to occur just at this particular moment, just at this particular spot ; but at the moment when it occurs that spot may be in the middle of a desolate prairie, or in the heart of some great industrial centre. In the former case, the earthquake is just an interesting natural phenomenon ; in the latter case, it is an *event* ; it has acquired a human interest ; has played a significant part in the lives of intelligent beings. I know that a silly habit has grown up in recent years of

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pretending that nature overshadows Man ; that the destruction of a city means only an infinitesimal alteration in the death statistics of one particular kind of animal, quite unimportant as compared with the majestic upheaval that has caused it. This is cant and folly ; there is nothing majestic about an earthquake unless there are men to know about it and to feel the consequences of it ; there is no importance at all about a Mars-quake, if such things occur. The materialist may put up a case for saying that man does not matter ; but if he proves his case it is quite certain that nothing else matters ; he should be called an immaterialist for his pains.

There could have been nothing about the fall of the bridge at San Luis Rey to justify its commemoration in a novel, if nobody had been crossing when it fell. It is just because so many human lives are ended by the fall, all at one moment yet at a moment which is different for each, that it becomes an event. There was nothing unusual about the storm which dispersed the Armada except the fact that an Armada happened to be on the seas at the time. Nor will the widow whose husband has been killed in an accident derive any consolation from a lecture on the law of centrifugal force. Man is not content to know merely *how* things happen ; he must needs go on asking, even though he gets no answer to his question, *why* things happen. He must have an attitude on the subject ; and there are three attitudes possible. You may believe in chance, or in fate, or in Providence.

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Belief (if you can call it a belief) in chance is necessary to the materialist ; he can think in no other terms. For the ordinary man, belief in chance is a mood rather than a conviction ; it sits on him lightly when he does not think much, and results in a vague optimism ; when he thinks too much, it becomes a kind of despairing refuge from thought. Belief in fate, which has logically nothing to recommend it, is a far commoner instinct. Herodotus will tell you that a catastrophe happened to some figure in his story “ when it was necessary that evil should befall him ” ; and, with precisely the same notion lurking in their minds, soldiers in the late War would refer to a death under the presumably theatrical metaphor, “ his number is up ”. There is an obstinate feeling, at least among men who are accustomed to take risks, that their lives are somehow *arranged* beforehand ; they cannot tell who makes the arrangement, nor why, nor even, commonly, whether the arrangement is beneficent, or malignant, or merely neutral ; but they will have it that the events of life are ruled by more than mere chance. This, I suppose, is why superstition always begins to step in where religion dies ; the gambler has his mascots, and the fortune-tellers reap their harvest, and men believe, or half-believe, in their lucky or unlucky stars.

But the instinct of religion, normally, is something quite different. It attributes the events of life, the moments at which our careers come in jarring contact with the law-governed world around us, to a purpose deliberately formed

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by a personal will. Not necessarily a beneficent will ; there is plenty of room, especially in primitive theologies, for the influence of evil spirits. But the religious view of history, even at its lowest, is not mere fatalism ; it assumes purpose, and, in proportion as the religion becomes more vital and more operative, assumes a friendly purpose. Sometimes we find a belief in fate and a belief in Providence existing side by side, with some confusion of thought as the result ; the powerlessness of the Almighty Zeus to go beyond the decrees of the fates is an instance in point—in the last resort, he can only stand beside the balance and pull the string, to let the fates automatically do their work. But, as love casts out fear, so belief in a loving Providence supersedes, in the end, belief in the dreadfulness of fate. And the theology preached by our Lord adopts a perfectly uncompromising attitude : “ Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing ? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father ”. Not content with the assertion that a divine conspiracy of goodness watches over the destinies of men, our Lord will have it that the most trivial incidents in nature—the impact with which a sparrow flies against a telegraph wire—are all foreordained, are all part of a scheme. There is no unit of force in the Universe, however regulated according to the principles of natural law, which does not come directly from a sentient and a loving God.

Historically, the influence of this teaching has been immense. For nineteen hundred years, men have lived by

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the belief that their fortunes were directly in God's hands, and the Saints of Christendom and the great heroes of non-Catholic Christianity have uniformly been men who felt, from day to day, the influence of a divine purpose upon their lives. And the Christian revelation goes further than this. Like all the effective religions of the world, it believes in impetrative prayer; in the power of human intercession to influence the purposes of Providence. Not in the sense, ordinarily, of suspending the action of natural laws; that would be miracle. What we mean, in the last resort, by "an answer to prayer", is that from the beginning of time, before he set about the building of the worlds, God foreknew every prayer that human lips would breathe, and took it into account. That, and nothing less, is the staggering claim which we make every time we say the "Our Father".

If I could have collected all the symposiasts in a room, this is the issue I would have put to them, to "try their spirits". By all means (I would have said) let us leave dogma on one side, let us take no notice of all the secular disputes which divide the sympathies of Christian people, let us refrain as far as possible from prying into mysterious secrets, too high for our ken. But—do you believe that God runs the world, and cares what happens in the world? For, if so, you will have to find something better than a pale, pantheist abstraction to satisfy your notion of God. And if not, you may spare your ink-stands; nothing that you can tell us about your religion

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will ever strengthen an infirm purpose or heal a broken heart.

In their eagerness to convey to us valuable moral advice, the symposiasts have burked this vital question with a singular unanimity. Once more I feel (perhaps wrongly) that I can interpret the mind of Mr Bennett ; I feel that when he talks about a Creator “ who had a clear aim, whatever that may be, in the creation and slow evolution of his universe ” he does not mean us to think of a Providence individually interested in the fate of this and that human creature here and now. I should rather be inclined to attribute to him a deistic notion of God’s Nature ; he thinks of the universe as planned with infinite wisdom in all its general principles of working ; and perhaps, too, of the human conscience as an organ designed, by slow evolution, to transform the human species into a pattern more worthy of its high position. But whether God is to be held responsible for the way in which this man or that man runs his head up against the eternal laws which govern the constitution of nature—on that point I fancy that Mr Bennett, with his unfailing frankness, would at least pronounce himself an agnostic.

Neither Mr Walpole nor any of the other writers in the same series makes any direct mention of the difficulty, even in enumerating the childish beliefs from which later reflection has emancipated him. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle does indeed speak of “ the great, kindly, brooding Spirit who yearns over the world with a special care ” ; but this is one of

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those non-committal phrases by which his familiars are wont to avoid awkward questions—perhaps he learned it from them. It neither denies nor asserts the existence of an effective providential scheme. Henry Arthur Jones went further; he asked: “How can I call that *spirit* which inhabits my flesh and directs my movements, and not call that *spirit* which inhabits this universal frame and directs its movements”? Yes, it directs; but does it control, and if so is that control absolute? A dead thing may direct us, a sign-post, for example. The spirit which inhabits my flesh directs my movements within certain well-defined limits; it does not enable me to lift a ton weight. And if the “spirit” which inhabits the universal frame is as much limited in its possibilities of choice as my human spirit, then it can only “direct” the fortunes of the universe in a very inferior degree. “Whether the tiny phagocyte expels the poison from my blood and saves me, or whether the deadly microbe instils the poison and kills me, there is alike purpose and intelligence directing their microscopic activities”. Yes, but once more, “directing” in what sense? If the spirit that inhabits the Universe merely whoops the phagocyte on to obey the laws of its phagocytic nature, I shall derive little consolation from the thought. What I want (like the friar in *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*) is to be sure that the right phagocyte or microbe always gets hold of the right person at the right moment, because it has been arranged that it shall. But has the Spirit which inhabits the Universe made those arrangements? If so,

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there is no proportion between the independence which it enjoys and the independence enjoyed by my own spirit in controlling the destinies of my own life. "I believe that all this vast universe is living intelligent spirit in its tiniest atom. I believe that we can rest in its faithfulness and punctuality". In other words, we can trust the microbe to do its job? Or is there Somebody or Something else that we can trust; and trust not merely to its punctuality but to its active benevolence? I suppose I am always very stupid when I read the utterances of the pantheists, but for the life of me I cannot understand why they always seem to dodge just the questions I want answered.

The final article in the series was attributed to "An Unknown Man", at whose identity I have had my own guess. He has, more than the others, the affectation of Christianity, and he does drop a hint or two on the subject we are here considering. He writes: "From my earliest thinking days of doubt and agnosticism I was convinced of this one thing—that if there *is* a God at work in the Universe, whose purpose is good, and if man can come into communion with him and consciously co-operate with him, then our life here in this queer and often sad world is indeed infinitely worth while". He seems to imply that (of course without any use of his reason) he has solved the doubt implied by the "if"; and he refers, in language not sanctioned by Mr Stacpoole, to the "All-Father". But whether he means us to understand that the All-Father exercises a parental control over all his works, or only over men's minds, I have

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not been able to discover. I distrust the language he uses when he says that God "came, and still comes, to share the fight and the suffering with us". If this is anything more than mere rhetoric, it means that the author believes in a God who is indeed personal, but has no control over the multitudinous tragedies of the Universe, and consequently is condemned, or condemns himself, to unhappiness by participating in them. This (if this is what is meant) is a retrograde step in theology; it is going back to the demi-gods of ancient myth, Attis, Osiris, Prometheus, who tried to help toiling mankind against fates which they had no power to overrule. Whatever else Christianity did or professed to do, it provided a solution (though a mysterious solution) of that helpless dualism by insisting that he who suffered on the Cross was himself, personally, the Omnipotent. And it is a false instinct of reverence which would justify his ways to men at the price of making him abdicate his Royalty.

This inadequacy of treatment is, to my mind, a very serious complaint against the *My Religion* series. Things may be otherwise among the high-brows, but I believe I speak for the generality of men when I say that it is no use talking to us about a God who is not Almighty, and must not be held responsible for occasional lapses in the Providential ordering of the world. Such a God may exist, but we do not care a rap whether he exists or not. Wherever the vestiges linger of that Christian creed which (even in its deformations) has been the philosophy of Europe for

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all these centuries, you will find that belief in Providence dies hardest. Your peasant who never goes to church, who has lost belief, it may be, in survival after death, will still have it that there is One above who knows best. If that confidence is lost, there is nothing between us and atheism.

Belief in a Providentially-ordered Universe does not necessarily involve any belief in the efficacy of prayer. It is possible to conceive of a world-order in which God should do what is best for each human being without reference to any desires stated or even entertained by us. *Carior est illis homo quam sibi*, wrote the satirist upon the vanity of human wishes—the gods love us better than we love ourselves; why, then, this impertinent affectation of trying to alter their purpose? But the converse is surely untrue—you cannot believe in the efficacy of prayer, as that is normally understood, if you disbelieve in the Providential government of the world. If you are going to say, for example, that A can recover from his illness as the result of B's prayers, you must surely imply that there is a Power sufficiently personal to be conscious that B is praying, and sufficiently powerful to decide whether the phagocytes or the microbes shall win.

It was with interest, therefore, that I turned to another symposium, organized once more by the *Daily Express*, with the plain, unvarnished title, IS PRAYER ANSWERED? I was disappointed to find that the method of empanelling the jury had, whether by accident or by design, been

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altered ; three out of the twelve were clergymen ; two at least of the remainder were normal, church-going Christians, and literature was on the whole under-represented. I fancy that the choice of contributors had significance ; the editor wanted to get a verdict of " Yes ", and if so, it was because he thought a verdict of " Yes " would be popular with his public. The public which will have nothing to do with creeds and dogmas, which insists on a simple, rational, understandable form of belief, still clings to its old *mumpsimus* here. Nothing could be more illogical ; for of all Christian dogmas I suppose that impetrative prayer is one of the most difficult to understand, one of the most difficult to defend against rationalist attack. But the British public is sentimental, and the British nature is superstitious when it is not religious. So the twelve good men and true were sworn in, without benefit of clergy.

There were, however, two jurors whose appearance on the list did make me knit my brows over the unanimous verdict. I had read Mr Beresford in *My Religion*, I had read Mr James Douglas on *God in These Times*, and I had not been able to detect in either case any sympathy with attempts to define God's Nature by means of attributes. Mr Beresford wrote in language acceptable to the pantheist ; Mr Douglas talked vigorously about the experience which he calls " faith ", and waved us back whenever we tried to interrupt and find out what kind of a God it was he believed in. Yet here they were, unmistakably on the side of the angels.

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Mr Douglas objects to crude creeds, to harsh dogmas, to the metaphysics of men. He thinks that the revelations of science "deepen our sense of the mystery which enshrouds" the plans and purposes of God, that "theology, the majestic science of religion, is slowly harmonizing itself with the majestic religion of science". All this is surely the language of a man who might be expected to fight shy of the old-fashioned, very dogmatic, highly anthropocentric notion that the Ruler of the Universe listens to men's prayers and is swayed by them. And the second half of his article on prayer is what we should have expected from a mind so poised; it is a long eulogy of mystical experience, which we should perhaps refrain from criticizing, since the author reminds us that "those who have not trodden the path of prayer cannot understand the language of prayer". He concludes that "prayer is above dogmas and doctrines, theologies and philosophies. Even the good agnostic can pray. Even the good rationalist can pray". We assume, then, that he uses the word "prayer" in some wide sense; wider, certainly, than the homely notion of asking your Father for something you want, and getting it.

But the first half of the article seems to belie this interpretation. It is a catena of instances, drawn from personal experience, in which the writer alleges that prayer has been followed by the restoration to health of patients whom doctors had despaired of. The last of these, which Mr Douglas calls "a miracle", was attributable to an Irish girl, who asked for the intercessions of St Theresa of Lisieux.

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Surely we may challenge Mr Douglas thus. Either he believes that these prayers achieved their object through the personal goodwill of an omnipotent Creator ; and if so he must set his feet, however unwillingly, upon the ladder of theological definition, and admit that after all he knows something, and knows something very important, about the personal Nature of God. Or he must assume that prayer is a force which obtains its object directly, through some unknown triumph of mind over matter—and that is, as we shall see, a very far-reaching difference.

Mr Beresford distinguishes. He does not mean by prayer “any impudent petition, made by a human being to the Almighty, for personal benefits”. He cites the obvious difficulty created by the prayers and counter-prayers that went up during the War ; he condemns the attitude of an old lady who had recourse to prayer when she wanted to find a pin she had dropped : “obviously some of her petitions, most of them possibly, appeared to have been answered ; but I doubt if her praying ever affected the result” ; and Mr Beresford even suggests that “such a habit as that, relegating as it did all personal responsibility to a higher power, must have had a debilitating effect on that woman’s mind and spirit”—a delightfully quaint point of view. And then, just when we were expecting him to uphold a consistent materialistic attitude, he too fires off instances from his personal experience in which unexpected recoveries have taken place after prayer ; and concludes that these prayers were heard because they

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were unselfish, being offered for the needs of others. And he feels confident that the majority of the cures at Lourdes were effected because they were cases "where relations had learned how to love and pray".

Now, all this is curiously odd logic. If Mr Beresford is really out to record phenomena, without dogmatizing about their interpretation, then he ought to be impressed by the frequent recovery of the pins. But if he thinks the pins might have been recovered without the prayers, then what answer has he for the rationalist who suggests that coincidence, or at the most telepathy, may have been responsible for the instances which he (Mr Beresford) regards as genuine? And, if the unselfishness of a prayer is the measure of its success, should we not expect that prayer offered for a stranger would be more effective than prayer offered for a near relative? But, above all, how are we to reconcile this belief in the efficacy of petitions offered to "a Power beyond the world that has supreme control of our destinies", with the very guarded allusions which the same author makes in *My Religion* to the "essential spirit" (without even capital letters) "of the whole universe"? Mr Beresford is surely blowing hot and cold; in one series he is content with pantheism, in another he assumes a transcendentalist system of theology.

Unless, once more, Mr Beresford thinks that prayer produces its effects as in its own right, without regard to the existence or non-existence of a loving God who can hear and answer us. Such a notion might perhaps receive

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encouragement from the extraordinary article contributed to the same series by the Rev. R. J. Campbell. Dr Campbell, alluding to some reminiscences published by Lord Beaverbrook, asks himself how it was that the famous newspaper owner rose from poverty to his present position of affluence and power. "The reason of his success is not hard to discover. . . . It resides chiefly in the fact that he knew what he wanted and prayed for it. . . . It does not follow that he always prayed directly to God, but he prayed. He sent forth his thought winged with energy, like a wireless beam-ray, into the invisible, and there were sent back to him in response the conditions he needed for the achievement of his aims".

Now, it does not seem to have occurred to Dr Campbell that many other people have wanted money, wanted it badly and prayed for it feverishly, and it never came. But, leaving this difficulty on one side, how are we to interpret this paragraph except as meaning that prayer is a process by which the power of a dominant will imposes itself, not merely on human beings, but on its physical surroundings—is, in fact, a triumph of mind over matter? From this interpretation Dr Campbell himself does not seem to shrink. The man who is described as "having the devil's luck", who is cornering wheat or otherwise amassing a fortune by illicit means "may scoff at the suggestion that he prays, but he does; he scarcely ever stops praying, and the answer he is getting is a sinister one". And accordingly, we ought to be very careful what we pray for. Mr A. C.

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Benson is cited as saying that he never prayed for definite things "without being very sure that it was wise to ask for them; for he had noticed that such things had a way of coming when he had ceased to want them". And Dr Campbell adds: "I should think this is an almost universal experience".

It may be almost universal; it is certainly not mine. Are we really to believe that the Almighty plays a game of cat-and-mouse with us—waits until we make a request which will, he sees, be fatal for us, and then triumphantly grants it, to our undoing? This may be paganism; it is not anything that I understand by Christianity. Prayer, to me, is committing my aspirations, however childish, to a Power which, if I ask for a stone, will nevertheless give me the bread I need. I do not understand how Dr Campbell can have lent his name to popularize such a view, unless he really believes that prayer achieves its purpose automatically, without the intervention of any beneficent Divine will. The notion of such efficacy is, to me, rank superstition; but even if there were anything in it, it would surely have nothing to do with religion. We should simply have to say that, among the various occult forces at work in the Universe, there was a force of human volition, which operated perhaps less easily, but no less certainly, than known forces such as that of gravitation. And I, at least, would be less than ever convinced that the world was Providentially governed.

I should not be in the least surprised if, in England, the

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doctrine that prayer is efficacious were to outlive the doctrine that God is Almighty. But if it is to be so, let us not delude ourselves by asking Gigadibs to write on *My Religion*. Let us call things by their right names, and ask him for two thousand words on *My Superstitions*.

VII

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MR MALLOCK, I think, in the *New Republic*, describes the Christianity of Dr Jowett as a new firm trading under the old name so as to capture the goodwill of its clients. If, *per impossibile*, the Christian religion should die out, the historian would find it difficult to explain why it exercised so powerful a fascination even in its decadence; why men who set themselves to trace out a new path in religion, remote from any of the conceptions which historic Christianity enshrined, should nevertheless have felt obliged to leave a place in their system, however casual and undignified, for the Figure of its Founder.

Few of the symposiasts have found it possible to write about their private religions without some acknowledgment to the influence of our Lord on the world's history. Mr Bennett "would not care to assert that in the field of morals Christ was not the greatest man that ever lived". Mr Walpole thinks that his teachings "apply with amazing wisdom and knowledge to modern conditions". Miss West seems convinced that the comfort which he brought to his own age was necessary to it in those dark times. To Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, in the light of his new revelation, "the Christ figure appears more beautiful and under-

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standable than ever". Mr Beresford regards his ethics as "beyond all comparison the most admirable rule of life ever given to the world". Mr Douglas tells us that "He knew more about God than any other Son of Man or any other Son of God. He is the supreme Interpreter and Revealer of God". Mr Raymond does not doubt that in some sense or other he incarnated God. The chorus is not unanimous, but it is at least representative.

What do they mean by "Christ" and "the teaching of Christ"? I have been at pains to rewrite the Gospel of St Matthew for the convenience of such persons, omitting no text which they could possibly want to quote. Here it is :

Jesus, seeing the multitude, went up into a mountain, and when he had sat down, his disciples came to him, and he opened his mouth and taught them, saying, Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the land. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall have their fill. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake. Whosoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgement. Resist not evil, but if one strike thee on thy right cheek, turn to him also the other. Give to him that asketh of thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn thou not away. Love your enemies, do good to them

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that hate you. Be you therefore perfect. When thou dost alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth. Lay not up to yourselves treasures on earth ; for where thy treasure is, there will thy heart be also. You cannot serve God and mammon. Judge not, that you may not be judged. Why seest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, and seest not the beam that is in thine own eye? All things therefore whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you also to them, for this is the law and the prophets. Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, and every evil tree bringeth forth evil fruit. Not every one that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven. The foxes have holes and the birds of the air nests, but the son of man hath not where to lay his head. Why are you fearful, O ye of little faith? And the Pharisees said to his disciples, Why doth your master eat with publicans and sinners? But Jesus hearing it, said, They that are in health need not a physician, but they that are ill. Go then and learn what this meaneth, *I will have mercy and not sacrifice*. Nobody putteth a piece of raw cloth unto an old garment, neither do they put new wine in old bottles. Behold, I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves ; be ye therefore as simple as doves. He that taketh not up his cross and followeth me is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that shall lose his life for me shall find it. Whosoever shall give to drink to one of these little ones a cup of

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cold water shall not lose his reward. I am meek and humble of heart. If you knew what this meaneth, *I will have mercy and not sacrifice*, you would not have condemned the innocent. It is lawful to do a good deed on the sabbath days. Whosoever shall do the will of my father, he is my brother and sister and mother. If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For what doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul? Jesus calling unto him a little child, said, Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of heaven. See that you despise not one of these little ones. Then came Peter to him and said, Lord, how often shall my brother offend against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times? Jesus saith to him, I say not to thee till seven times, but till seventy times seven times. If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast and give to the poor. Whosoever will be the greater among you, let him be your minister, and he that will be first among you shall be your servant, even as the son of man is not come to be ministered to but to minister. Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and that bought in the temple. Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's and to God the things that are God's. Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The scribes and Pharisees do all their works to be seen of men, and they love the first places at feasts and the first

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chairs in the synagogues ; whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled, and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ; because you tithe mint and anise and cummin and have left the weightier things of the law, judgement and mercy and faith ; these things you ought to have done. Thou blind Pharisee, first make clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, that the outside may become clean. I was hungry, and you gave me to eat, I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink, I was a stranger, and you took me in, naked and you covered me, sick, and you visited me ; I was in prison, and you came to me ; Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me ; as long as you did it not to one of these least, neither did you it to me. Put up again thy sword into his place, for all that take the sword shall perish with the sword. And after they had crucified him, Jesus again crying with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.

Finis.

This is the whole Gospel, as it lives in the mind of the ordinary non-church-going Englishman ; at least, you could amplify it a little by throwing in one or two other texts which are peculiar to St Mark or St Luke, even here and there a Johannine saying, violently torn from its context. This is all they want our Lord to have said ; therefore, for them, it is all he did say. They like his denunciations of

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hypocrisy, because they are such fine, straightforward fellows themselves ; they like his recommendation to turn the other cheek, not because they have any intention of turning theirs, but because they can gleefully point to a similar reluctance on the part of us, who call ourselves Christians. They have arbitrarily selected a catena of texts, roughly what I have given above, and have labelled these " the teaching of Christ " ; that he ever said anything or did anything besides this, they have conveniently forgotten. In fact, what they serve up to us under this name is simply the old-fashioned Victorian Gospel of the pre-Schweitzer epoch in theology ; the " gentle Jesus " tradition of Renan.

How, then, did Christianity take on any other form ? By the addition, they hasten to tell us, of man-made dogmas ; you know, the Incarnation, and the Atonement, and the Resurrection, and all that. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle has summed it up for us in a slogan : " The less dogma, the more Christ ". They are vaguely conscious that a man called Harnack wrote a book called *The History of Dogma*, showing how all the articles of the creed were a development out of some primitive deposit of simple Christian belief. What they do not stop to consider is that there is a difference between a process of development and a process of addition ; development of dogma implies that there were, from the first, certain dogmas which it was possible to develop. It is the familiar mistake of forgetting that Christianity is older, not younger, than the Gospels.

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There is no doubt whatever, if they would take the trouble to go back to the documents, that there was *a* dogma of the Incarnation, *a* dogma of the Atonement, *a* dogma of the Resurrection, in the writings of St Paul. Whether subsequent theologians may have "developed" those dogmas is another question; but no man who has the courage to face the facts can possibly doubt that they were there.

The earliest Christians preached Christ, not as the author of a set of moral apophthegms, but as one who had risen from the dead. I can only remember one quotation from our Lord's own sayings in St Paul, and it is a saying which the Gospels have not preserved to us. It would be an intelligible account of the matter to argue thus: "There was, it is clear, a remarkable man called Jesus whose followers came to believe that he had risen from the dead; as time went on, they began to attribute to him all sorts of ethical sayings, some borrowed from the Old Testament, some adapted from the quoted works of other Jewish Rabbis, some merely invented and put into his mouth; thus they came to think of him as a great moral Teacher". There would, I say, be a certain plausibility about such an account. But the idea that Jesus was a great moral Teacher, and that men afterwards came to think he had risen from the dead is simply unhistorical; you are putting the cart before the horse. The message which electrified the world of the first century was not "Love your enemies", but "He is risen".

I do not mean to deny the influence of Christian ethics

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on the early Church ; I am only saying that, as a matter of historical evidence, we can be more certain that the dogmas were believed than that the texts were spoken. And the primitive Christian teaching in which the symposiasts invite us to believe is not a historical fact ; it is simply the reflection of their own personal opinions ; it is not history, but a myth. And it is not possible to read the Gospels themselves, to read a single chapter of the Gospels, without realizing that the alleged “ teaching of Christ ” is the creation of scissors and paste. Jesus Christ did say these things, but he said a great deal more. And—a fact which these extracts conceal—it is quite certain that he was continually talking about himself.

Let us recall the gallery of “ spiritual giants ” enumerated by Mr Ernest Raymond. “ Buddha, Christ, Plotinus, St John of the Cross, Shakespeare, Goethe, and Keats ”. What would have been our impression, if Buddha had said : “ All power is given to me in heaven and in earth ” ? If Plotinus had said : “ No one cometh unto the Father but by me ” ? If St John of the Cross had said : “ Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart ” ? If Shakespeare had said : “ He that confesseth me before men, the same will I confess before my Father who is in heaven ” ? If Goethe had said : “ Son, be of good cheer ; thy sins are forgiven thee ” ? If Keats had said : “ A greater than Solomon is here ” ?

Mr Bertrand Russell, contemplating such phrases as those just quoted, says that he is unable to admire Jesus of Nazareth, because there runs all through his teaching a

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strong vein of megalomania. I confess that I find this attitude much easier to understand than the attitude of the symposiasts. How is it that they have trained themselves to recognize a "great spiritual Expert" in one whose utterances, if they were repeated by an ordinary Saint, would be written down at once as blasphemous delusions of the devil? It is the fault, I think, of their haphazard English upbringing. For one thing, they have been accustomed to hear texts bandied about in support of arguments, without any reference to an ecclesiastical tradition of which those texts are merely illustrative; and they live, accordingly, not by the Gospel, but by those texts in the Gospel which they happen to remember. Further, there remains hidden in the back of their minds the purely Christian impression that Caiphas and the Jews were guilty of a gross injustice when they crucified our Lord as a blasphemer; therefore our Lord was not a blasphemer; but it is blasphemy for a man to claim to be God; therefore, all evidence notwithstanding, our Lord cannot have claimed to be God. And moreover, from too much habituation to vagueness in the sermons of their youth, they have the instinct that when you are talking about religion anything can mean anything; any phrase can be reduced to a metaphor, or explained away without doing injury to common honesty of thought.

I cannot forbear to quote, in justification of this last statement, what Mr Beresford says about the divinity of our Lord—to do him justice, he is the only symposiast who makes any attempt to face the problem. Not that he

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tackles it directly, being a symposiast, but he drags it in at the tail of an argument in which he feels that popular sympathy will be on his side. "The dogmas of the Churches", he says, "appear to me to be utterly at variance with the spirit of Christ. To take the most obvious of many examples, I can find no warrant in Christ's teaching for the doctrine that a man shall find salvation only by following the particular articles of belief adopted by one particular sect or division of the Christian Church. The clearest statement that Christ made in this connexion was, *He that believeth on me shall not perish*. And I choose to accept that at once in its simplest and widest significance ; not as implying he that believes in an endless rigmarole of senseless ordinances and ritual originally imposed by priests for their own purposes ; but as he that believes in the divine principle in himself and all mankind".

"I can find no warrant"—oh, Mr Beresford, was it necessary to tell us that you had had a Low Church upbringing? Where else would you have learned to read the Bible piecemeal, making no attempt to form a complete view of the Gospel story, but isolating a particular text which you had read somewhere on a card of texts, and letting the whole weight of your argument rest on that? And you did not give us the whole text either, because it might have confused the reader by suggesting that our Lord's claim was, after all, a peculiar one. But let us have the whole text, as you first learned it : "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, to the end that

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all who believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life ". His only-begotten Son—no allusion, somehow, to the divine principle in all mankind. Now, we will cut it off just there, and paste it on a strip of card, and see what you have made of it.

You started out by talking about "the dogmas of the Churches"; you implied that all forms of Christianity made this exclusive claim which you find so repulsive. Then you quote our Lord's words, and tell us what they do not refer to; and what is that? "An endless rigmarole of senseless ordinances and ritual imposed by priests for their own purposes"—you see? He has forgotten that his quarrel was with "the Churches", and has narrowed it down into an attack upon us poor foolish Catholics; any stick will do to beat the Romans with. Mr Beresford has not taken the trouble to consider what George Fox meant by belief in Christ, or John Wesley, or Charles Simeon; he has lumped them all together with us, greatly protesting, as "priests" who invented a rigmarole of senseless ordinances and ritual in order (presumably) to make money out of it. And so he passes on to what the sentence does mean.

And what does it mean? What he chooses to make it mean; he says so. "I choose" to accept that in a particular significance; no attempt, you will observe, to ask what significance our Lord meant us to attach to it when he made the utterance; it shall be what Mr Beresford chooses. And the only defence that he can make of his choice is that

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the significance which he attaches to the verse is "its simplest and widest significance". Over the word "simplest" I distinguish. The signification alleged is certainly the simplest in the sense that it takes little or no believing. But is it the simplest in the sense that it is *the most natural way of understanding the speaker's drift*? Reference has been made to Moses lifting up the brazen serpent in the wilderness; in the same way, the Son of Man (that is, the Speaker) must be "lifted up", so that all men may believe in him. This means, according to Mr Beresford, that there is a sort of World-spirit about, which permeates or ought to permeate the mind both of "himself" (it is not clear what subject is referred to) and everybody else; if we believed that, we should all be very good. Can any sane man suppose that this is a *simple* explanation in the sense of being a *natural* explanation?

Mr Beresford ought to read the Gospels straight through, and carefully, if he takes his own explanations seriously. Then he would realize that though theologians may have disputed for centuries as to the precise sense in which our Lord claimed to be God, he quite evidently claimed to be in a different position from all other men; to possess certain privileges uniquely, not merely in a higher degree than others. He taught his disciples to pray "Our Father"; but he never spoke to them of "our Father"; "my Father" and "your Father" again and again, but never "our Father". And he was crucified because he claimed to be "the Christ, *the* Son of the living God"; is there

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any loophole of thought by which that title could be explained as other than unique? There is nothing whatever in Mr Beresford's system, as far as I can see, which demands a Christology at all ; but he must needs invent one, merely to show that we Christians are not true followers of Christ. I should like to see him debating the point with Mr Bertrand Russell.

This is one way in which the symposiasts try to retain the vestiges of a Christianity ; by pretending, in the manner of the middle nineteenth century, that our Lord was a misjudged Pantheist. Miss West has a different recipe ; she will save the face of the early Church by allowing that its pretty fables were valuable in their time, but we have outgrown all that sort of business now. Christianity was a pedagogue, to bring us to Miss West. Or perhaps to some future revelation, whose coming she vaguely heralds. Our Lord came "to satisfy the spiritual needs of man as he was during the centuries that resulted in the establishment of modern Europe". At the time Man was "for the most part, very poor ; whether he was poor or rich he was racked with diseases he could not understand", and so on. "In such a harsh and unsettled world he might well doubt if the law of the Universe were not hate, and the meaning of life bitterness. Christ came to comfort him against these adversities. He proved to him that poverty and suffering could be borne so sweetly that they exalted a man above the proudest and richest king ; he struck back some of the world's swords by preaching the beauty of peace ; he

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assured man that love was a power in the Universe by coming to render him these services, though he knew he must pay for it with his life ”.

He must pay with his Life—for what? For bearing poverty and suffering with sweetness? It is hard to see why Caiphas should have minded that. For preaching the beauty of peace? But no such charge was made against him at his arraignment before Pilate. As a matter of fact, contentment with poverty and the beauty of peace were commonplaces of the period, and it would be much more exact to describe the poet Horace as concerned to preach them than our Lord. But apparently, according to Miss West, this teaching by example was not sufficient. It was necessary that it should be bolstered up by lies ; otherwise people would not have believed in it. Whether our Lord himself encouraged the use of those lies, Miss West does not tell us. She proceeds to point out what useful lies they were, in a period when people were, unlike us, so often poor and miserable, and had to suffer from most of the same diseases as ourselves without having ever learned the blessed word *phagocyte*.

I have already drawn attention to Miss West's curious choice of examples in giving us instances of those lies ; the doctrine of the Virgin Birth and that of the Atonement. However, her former instance is at least intelligible ; it would add more weight to our Lord's words if people could be gulled into believing that he had a miraculous origin. But what the Atonement has got to do with it, on

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Miss West's showing, I still cannot see. The doctrine of the Atonement is one which Miss West thinks cruel and barbarous ; by her misrepresentation of it she has done her best to make it appear cruel and barbarous. It was, she says, "credible enough to people who believed that hate might be the ultimate law of life. . . . Man was in a dark place. Christ came to comfort". This means, presumably, that men in our Lord's time thought of themselves as sinners, and therefore it was comforting for them to be told that their sins had been taken away by a Divine Mediator. Yes, but why was the lie necessary? Would it not have been better to reveal to them that blessed certainty in which we moderns live, that there is no such thing as sin? I feel, somehow, that Miss West got bored with her argument, and dropped it in the middle.

We must be grateful to Miss West for recognizing that the Christian religion in its infancy appealed to mankind, not by offering them a string of texts, but by proposing certain dogmas for their belief ; two such she has mentioned, though she has left out the most important of all, the Resurrection. I suppose it is safe to assume that in her view the Resurrection was a lie like all other "dogmas". In fact, all these "Christian" ideas which have now become so much part of our blood that we can entertain them without any dogmas to encourage us, were originally instilled into mankind by an organized system of deception, carried out by our Lord or by his immediate followers, which Miss West hardly seems to reprobate. One wonders,

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is not Miss West, are not her collaborators, a little premature in letting the cat out of the bag? Is it not possible that there are still people in the world who are in dark places, needing comfort; people who still want supernatural sanctions to enable them for the struggle of life? Might we not have spared them their illusions?

She would answer, no doubt, that Truth is sacred; in which I should cordially agree with her. Only, if the origins of Christianity are so steeped in fraud as she suggests, I should have thought it would have been a good thing for her and her friends to give up using the terms *Christ* and *Christian* in the discussion of the subject, and avow that their ideals are the ideals of humanitarianism. Until, of course, Miss West's "new revelation" comes, and a fresh series of falsehoods comforts the world once more.

The argument of this chapter has taken the form of a *reductio ad absurdum*, and it may have looked as if I were endeavouring to bludgeon the symposiasts out of their last remaining contact with Christianity. I need hardly say that I intend no such ungracious proceeding. I would not have them ask themselves whether the inspiration they seem to derive from our Lord's figure in the world's history is worth keeping; but whether, if they would look into it, it does not imply something more than they have yet suspected, of homage and even of belief. They shrink from the round denials of Mr Russell; they will not have the name of Christ expunged from the vocabulary of their thought. Is it possible that they do not know their own

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minds? Is it possible that they have too readily acquiesced in a fashion of creedlessness, without reflecting whether it was really compatible with the convictions they held? The symposiasts are sometimes dogmatic, and sometimes their dogmas are not even, as dogmas should be, points of agreement between them. We have already seen what Mr Beresford said about an "endless rigmarole of senseless ordinances and ritual". Let us hear now Miss West on the same subject: "I go also to Roman Catholic churches at times, for the sake of the ritual. That seems to me to be of great value, because it draws a picture of spiritual facts which human language still finds it difficult to express adequately or in a form equally comprehensible by all kinds of people". The symposiasts, it is clear, have something to learn from one another. Is it not possible that they have lessons to learn, also, from older teachers; that Mr Beresford is mistaking the outward shows of a system which he has never had the opportunity to understand, and that Miss West, when she asks for a new revelation, is really wanting a revelation which never grows old?

VIII

THE PRUDERY OF THE MODERNS

THE symposiasts, as we have seen, are apt to twit professing Christians with their failure to live up to the standard which the Christian religion recommends. And some of them, the less mystically inclined, have evidently got the impression that we have no need to look about us for a new religion; Christianity itself would be novelty enough, if we would only begin to live by it. There is, of course, a paradoxical kind of truth in the contention. But I am not sure that they have realized the difficulties which beset us, if we try to identify the Christian religion with a mere code of ethics, or with a vague inspiration calculated to encourage generous conduct. If I choose out Mr de Vere Stacpoole as the spokesman of this particular philosophy, it is not that he stands alone, it is only because he has given it greater prominence.

Indeed, the casual reader might be excused for surmising that Mr Stacpoole had mistaken his terms of reference; that he had contributed to the series entitled *My Religion* the material for a discursus upon *Other People's Morals*. For the gist of his contention seems to be this: All traditional religion is mere conventionality, and has omitted justice and truth and the weightier matters of the law.

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Witness the fact that twelve men were hanged for thefts, etc., in 1818, and one boy for arson in 1830. We do nothing of the sort nowadays, so that the mind is led to say: "Surely Christ has come to the world again". But we have a long way to go before this Christianizing process has finished.

Now, the natural implication of this argument is that Christianity means nothing other than a humane spirit introduced into the world under the influence of our Lord's teaching; a spirit which diffused itself very slowly indeed until after the first quarter of the nineteenth century. But as a matter of fact, the history of criminal procedure, to which Mr Stacpoole has made his appeal, is not by any means plain sailing. Larceny, the *Encyclopædia* informs us, was not yet a capital offence in the time of King Alfred; here, then, the idea of a steady progress is misleading. And of course the reason why the punishment in 1818 was out of all proportion to the offence is a simple one; the statute which defined greater and lesser larceny had been passed centuries before, when the purchasing power of money was quite different, and a shilling was a comparatively important sum. In fact, as the purchasing power of money became steadily less, the incidence of the law's severity became steadily greater. In the same way, most of us have been shocked, in reading Boswell's *Johnson*, to think of poor Dr Dodd being hanged for forgery. But if we suppose that this was a senseless survival of medieval practice, we are gravely in error; forgery was made a statutory offence in 1562, and a capital offence only in 1634.

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The fluctuations of the human conscience in the matter of slavery (for example) are notorious. You cannot make the humanitarian instinct travel in a strict curve.

I hope I shall not be understood as denying, or as deploring, the whole progress of human civilization. I do, of course, believe that more importance is attached to the value of a human life, that more care is taken to avoid unnecessary pain, in our day than in earlier times ; and I believe that this is a good thing as far as it goes—more, that it is a legitimate consequence of the Christian philosophy and a legitimate expression of the Christian spirit. Nor do I dispute the still more glaring fact that our modern humanitarianism dates, in the main, from last century ; from the time when the rich people of the world began to feel uncertain about their own position. That the principles of pity and charity which had for centuries been illustrated in individual lives should have been so little illustrated in the general constitution of society is clearly a matter of regret. It is also a matter for surprise, but less so when you consider that human nature in the mass is more difficult to move than human nature in the individual. Anybody who casts his mind back to his own school-days will remember how treacherous a guide to conduct is public opinion.

In all that I agree fully with Mr Stacpoole. What I cannot understand is how, exactly, he contrives to make a personal religion out of this doctrine of modern progress. To him, as we have seen, the best form of worship is

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“clinging to good” ; and this simple faith is not, he says, easy of observance, because it involves the recognition of the rights of man. I do not know whether I am very oddly constituted, but personally I find the recognition of the rights of man as easy as falling off a log. I do not want to string people up for petty larceny, or for burning hayricks ; but does that make me a religious man ? I should think it monstrous if anybody proposed to execute a man for forgery. Dr Johnson, though he made desperate efforts to secure a reprieve, did not quarrel with the legislation which sent Dr Dodd to his fate—am I, therefore, a more religious man than Dr Johnson ? I wish I could feel it true. Or ought I to take my cue from the hint “we have still a long way to go” ? Ought I to be agitating for smaller and ever smaller sentences for theft, on pain of being thought irreligious ? I have every respect for the real reformers, for the half-dozen people or so in each generation who really leave the world better than they found it. But—to put one’s name to a few documents clamouring for the abolition of war, to vote now and again for a candidate who promises to pull down the slums, to drop a penny into a plate for the Protection of Aborigines, is that religion ? It may be a form of religion, but for the life of me I cannot see that it is a particularly exacting one.

Is not Mr Stacpoole, like most of the people who lecture us in his vein, guilty of a confusion between the form and the content of morality ? He writes as if the chief difficulty of life were knowing what your duty is ; and as if the

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message which our Lord brought into the world were a solution of that difficulty. So Sir Arthur Conan Doyle writes of "that raising of ethical standards which we associate with . . . Jesus of Nazareth". You would suppose, from the way these moderns talk, that the world of Tiberius's time had been all agog to do its duty if only it could have found out where its duty lay; that the revelation it needed was given to it by the Sermon on the Mount, only, most unfortunately, this admirable programme was concealed from it by the machinations of the priests for nearly eighteen centuries. But, as a matter of plain fact, the chief difficulty of life is not knowing where your duty lies,¹ but doing it. The world of Tiberius's time was, in theory, particularly alive to its own short-comings; it knew all about the horrors of war, the deceitfulness of riches, the tragedy of loveless marriage, the vanity of human ambitions, the degradation of vice: you can quote heathen poets by the yard in illustration of such doctrines. What it lacked was not the power to distinguish right from wrong, but a supernatural motive which would enable it to choose between them. It wanted an inspiration which would teach it to live up to its lights; that is what, as a matter of history, the Christian religion has been concerned to supply, to it and to all succeeding generations.

I hope I may be pardoned if I quote, in this connexion,

¹ Thus Mr Russell assures us (*Why I am Not a Christian*, p. 20) that the principle of non-resistance to evil "was used by Lâo-Tse and Buddha 500 or 600 years before Christ".

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a passage from a published work of my own ; I do not know that I can put the matter any more succinctly than I did sixteen years ago. The Christian revelation “came at a time when the armies of the world were continually on the verge of mutiny, and all it had to say was, Be content with your wages. It came at a time when slaves suffered revolting ill-treatment, and said, Servants, obey your masters. It came when problems of Imperial Government and national sentiment were very much in the air, nowhere more so than in Palestine, and gave the oracular advice, Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar’s ”. It would puzzle Mr Stacpoole, I think, if we asked him to determine from the Sermon on the Mount exactly how heavy a sentence ought to be inflicted for a theft of a hundred pounds. Mind, I do not say that there is no connexion between Christianity and the moral progress of our race ; it did bring with it a spirit of lenity which began to make itself felt immediately, as you may see from St Paul’s exhortations to Philemon in the matter of a runaway slave. But that spirit had to make itself felt first in the individual, only unfolded itself gradually in the general ordinances of society. I repeat that the prime purpose of the Christian revelation was not to show men what they ought to do, but to give them the inspiration (if you dislike the word *grace*) to do it.

Now, the attitude of the moderns, as represented by Mr Stacpoole, appears to be this—that the doctrines upon which historic Christianity rests for its inspiration, the doctrines of grace, sin, redemption, repentance, etc., need not trouble

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us any longer. You may say that they were useless from the first, or you may say that they did valuable work in their time, while we were fools enough to believe in them, but they are no use now. The really valuable part of Christianity was and is its code of morals—charity, honesty, humility, love of peace, and so forth ; and this code of morals, small thanks to the priests, has come into the world and has come to stay. We have only got to recognize it, to acquiesce in it, and to live up to it as far as the frailty of our nature permits, and—that is religion. But is it? Might it not even be said to stop short just where religion, properly speaking, begins? I am loth to use so hackneyed an illustration, but are not the moderns somewhat in the position of the small girl in the story-books of our youth, who bought one of the coloured bottles in the chemist's window, because it was so pretty, and then proceeded to empty out the nasty water inside it? Are we certain that the Christian code of morals, in any recognizable form, can outlive, indefinitely, the loss of the inspiration which produced it?

No doubt but Christian principles in legislation will survive, so long as our society remains stable. If we can steer clear of revolution, we need not fear the reappearance of monstrous death-sentences, or of torture, or of formal slavery. Our modern institutions, after all, have justified themselves by the utilitarian test. Masters will continue to be kind to their servants, as long as there is any danger of their giving notice ; blows will not be exchanged in public, while there is a policeman round the corner ; hayricks will

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not be burnt, for we have no quarrel with the insurance companies. Nay, it is reasonable to hope that we shall go further yet, and that the establishment of a kind of international police system will reduce the danger of war to a minimum. But is the spirit of charity which produced, or ought to have produced, such beneficent legislation, necessarily eternal? Is it certain that it can be kept alive indefinitely on those husks of religious consolation which are all the symposiasts have to offer?

This, even if the scissors-and-paste Gospel of last chapter contained the whole of Christian morals. As a matter of fact, it only contains less than one-third of Christian morals, as those have been traditionally understood. You can sin against God, or against your neighbour, or against yourself. And you can sin against your neighbour in either of two ways; by doing harm to his soul (through bad example, etc.) or to his body and his temporal goods. If I am not mistaken, it is to this last department of morals, either principally or entirely, that the symposiasts refer when they talk about "Christianity".

"My duty towards God", said the catechism they learned in their youth, "is to believe in him, to fear him, and to love him". Do they admit a duty of believing in God? Hardly; for (so far as he exists) his existence can only be detected by that strange "supersense" of faith which is not granted to everybody. There can be no duty of fearing him, for the religion of fear is altogether abhorrent; fear, as we have seen, is responsible for adenoids.

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And, as for the duty of loving him, there is a strange silence on the point. Mr Beresford, for example, says: "This, then, in conclusion, is what religion means to me—the belief that God seeks to express himself in us . . . by the practice of a principle which was incorporated by Christ in the words *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*." Once more, you see, he has chopped a verse in half for us; what our Lord said was: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God . . . and thy neighbour as thyself"—or rather, he approved of the scribe who laid down the principle. Mr Mottram, Mr Douglas, Mr Raymond reiterate their belief in a God, but without suggesting that we have any direct duty towards him. Upon my word, I can find no reference to loving God in the whole batch of contributions, unless it be Henry Arthur Jones praying that he may "be drawn into aspiring communion with that Power whose abundant life gave me life"; which is, at best, a frigid way of putting it. And yet our Lord, whom they all acclaim as "the greatest of Spiritual Experts" and the rest of it, spoke of loving God and loving your neighbour as two separate things, and put the love of God first.

That religion imposes duties towards ourselves, apart from the duty of making the world more comfortable for other people, is an idea which receives some recognition. Mr Bennett, more accurately minded than his *confrères* as usual, makes the admission expressly. He thinks that the cultivation of "kindliness, mercy, humility, forgiveness, and such acts as the suffering of fools gladly . . . should

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constitute the main part of religion", and even that these virtues "alone refine the soul". But he tells us that kindness does not comprise the whole of "works"; there are other things which matter, though he does not specify them. Miss West condemns the drunkard and the frivolous to annihilation. Mr Beresford makes religion consist in "faith as a means to the practice of self-restraint"; and although the acts which he chiefly reprobates are those which can be described as "mean, selfish, cruel, cowardly, intolerant", we must suppose that the term "self-restraint" includes some control of the passions. No, the symposiasts do not entirely neglect the existence of self-regarding duties. But do they tell us much about them? Do they tell us what we want to know?

The influence of religion upon conduct in its widest extent; the question whether "duty" exists, or whether kindness is the only thing that matters; the value to be attached to purity, or decency, or self-control—all these questions, as if by an organized conspiracy, they leave on one side. They may have held that in all such respects we are a great advance on our ancestors, but why did they not say so? They may have held that purity is a superstition and self-control a crime against nature, but why did they not say so? They leave off talking about religion just where religion becomes interesting to two Englishmen in every three. They make the old Victorian assumption, which in our time has patently broken down, that you can obliterate the religious beliefs of a nation without affecting its standards

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of morality. Ideally of course you can ; ideally the pagan has the same ethical duties as the Christian. But in practice, after so many centuries of identification, religion and morals are deeply interconnected. And the plain fact is that whereas our fathers asked themselves whether the creed was true, their sons are asking whether the Ten Commandments matter.

I am wrong—there is one single allusion in *My Religion* to the possible need for a new morality. It occurs in the course of a painfully rambling article contributed by Israel Zangwill. “Agonized incurables”, he says, “*must* be relieved of their agony”. Here, at least, is a man who is bold enough to call for an innovation ; he wanted to extend the area of justifiable homicide, and (presumably) to introduce a doctrine of justifiable suicide. The old debate, whether suicide is ever right, will serve admirably for an illustration of the point with which we are concerned. The pagans were in two minds about it ; Plato forbade it, Cato canonized it. The Christian tradition, Protestant as well as Catholic, uniformly condemns it. Mr Geoffrey Gilbey, in the *I believe* series, goes out of his way to tell us that he believes suicide is the worst crime, next to cruelty ; “God entrusts our lives to us, and we have got to bear whatever we are sent to bear”. Such is the judgement of a contributor who writes as an orthodox Anglican. What would Mr Stacpoole have said, or Miss West, or Mr Beresford ? Suicide is plainly a self-regarding act ; if it affects our neighbours, the result is commonly to relieve them of

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an embarrassment. Is the doctrine which justifies it tolerated, or is it repudiated, by the reinforced Christianity of the symposiasts?

I am not heckling ; I am not raising side-issues to darken counsel. The modern attitude towards suicide is one of the most interesting problems of the statistician. It was in 1879, in the heyday of the Evolutionary attack on Christianity, that W. H. Mallock wrote, and dedicated to John Ruskin, a book called *Is Life worth Living?* It provoked, from Alfred Austin, one of the worst poems in the language ; otherwise it remained unanswered. Between 1886 and 1905 the number of suicides in England and Wales had risen from 2,254 to 3,545 for the annual total ; that is, from 82 in every million to 104 in every million of the population. A recent letter in *The Times* points out that the figure now stands at 4,882, or 124 to the million. Nor is England alone here. The number of suicides in Europe during the nineteenth century is variously estimated between 1,300,000 and two millions ; but it is certain that of these 400,000 were registered between 1890 and 1900. The growing curve of self-destruction accompanies the general abandonment, by a large proportion of educated people, of the faiths in which they had been brought up. Meanwhile, it is recognized by statisticians that Catholic countries are singularly free from this influence, at least where the faith has held firm. France heads the list of European countries, but Spain and Ireland stand at the end of it.

I am not concerned here to discuss the moral aspects of

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suicide ; I am quite content to believe that a great majority of those who take their own lives are sufficiently unsettled in their wits to be incapable of a deliberate action. But I do so suggest that the modern enlightenment which has entailed (it would appear) such grave consequences has been unhealthy in its moral reactions. It has made the problem of living so difficult that an unprecedented number of people have been encouraged to take the simplest way out ; to cut the knot and ease themselves of life as of a burden. Now, is the modern religiosity which the symposiasts preach going to help us here? Is it going to inspire us with a sense of duty which will enable us to avoid making a mess of life ; which will encourage us, if we do make a mess of life, to face the music? Or are we to continue with our present inflated statistics of self-confessed despair?

And if the prevalence of suicide is ominous, because it suggests failure to cope with the difficulties of the moral life in general, there is an equally ominous symptom which suggests failure to cope with them in the specialized department of sex—I mean, I need hardly say, the prevalence of divorce. I know that at the mention of this word a considerable number of my readers will want to retort upon me, that divorce after all is an honest way of confessing failure. It is preferable to those cloaked infidelities to which, if divorce is unobtainable, unhappy marriage so often gives rise. But, once more, I am not arguing the grounds on which some people seek to justify the institution of divorce ; I am only arguing about it as a symptom. As

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a matter of fact, it is perfectly obvious that, with divorce as with so many other things, the supply is apt to create the demand; facilitate divorce, and a whole crowd of people will discover that they were unhappily married who were not previously conscious of any such feelings. A violent intensification of the demand for divorce does surely mean, not that we are getting less superstitious about the social taboos we once recognized, but that there is a general breakdown in that self-restraint which is needed for happy marriage, or even for happy concubinage. And if the suits on the list for the Michaelmas term of 1929 amounted to 900, exactly double the figure reached in the corresponding term of 1928, is it not to be feared (even if we had no independent evidence) that our moral tone in sexual matters is positively deteriorating?

It seems to me a matter of amazement that so many literary people, whose novels suggest (in some cases) that sex is the one subject which dominates their minds, should have managed to turn out a set of essays on religion in which the relations between religion and sex were steadily and persistently ignored. Nor is it only the novelists that are guilty of this mysterious silence. Sir Thomas Horder wrote a long article in the series *If I were a Preacher* for the *Daily Telegraph*; its sub-title was "Spiritual Aspect of Doctor's Work". Will it be believed that from beginning to end it contained no reference to sexual problems? The whole world is full of the discussion of sex; the papers are full of it, the novel is full of it; a whole new department

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of medicine has sprung up in our lifetime almost entirely concerned with it. There is only one connexion in which a mawkish delicacy prevents us from alluding to the topic, and that is when we are discussing religion! Nothing could illustrate more forcibly the emasculate, namby-pamby character of our modern religiosity than its refusal to look facts in the face. After all, to the ordinary young man the next problem after "Does God exist?" is the problem "Does God mind if I make a beast of myself?" It is his deep-seated conviction that the man who makes outward professions of religion, and at the same time is deliberately guilty of moral irregularities is a hypocrite; and there is no stigma he dreads more. If he is protected from such irregularities by his natural temper, or by fortunate influences, these vague modern creeds will suit him well enough. Otherwise, he knows that they are too weak to have any influence on his conduct; and accordingly they have no meaning for him. He may perhaps take them up in middle life, when he has "settled down". But is that what we ask of religion—that it should be a hobby of the middle-aged? Do we want a guardian angel who deserts us in the fiery furnace of youth, and rejoins us placidly when we have come out into the cool airs of later life? That is my challenge to the symposiasts.

They are never tired of recommending the "ethical teaching" of Jesus Christ. Can they deny that the Master whose name they invoke, infinitely tender as he was towards the sinner, put chastity as well as charity in the

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forefront of his ethical programme? “Whosoever shall look upon a woman to lust after her hath already committed adultery with her in his heart”, “He that marrieth her that is put away committeth adultery”—these sentiments, too, are to be found in the Sermon on the Mount, before the scissors got to work on it. If the new religion has taken over these principles from the old, and is prepared to stand by them, why does it pass them over in silence? If it is going to overhaul the morals of Christianity as well as its dogma, why does it leave us in doubt on the subject? I think Miss West’s contribution does give a faint suggestion of discontent with our present moral standards; her crown of immortality does seem destined for those who live intensely rather than for those who live by principle. But even she does not follow up her own argument; she wanders off into the usual set of platitudes. It is in uncertain tones, after all, that she fulminates from her little Sinai.

I say that these newspaper religions are paper religions, not meant to be lived by. Gigadibs will spread on the colour lavishly, as long as he is talking about kindness, and sincerity, and social justice, and all the virtues which the man in the street thinks he possesses. When it comes to the difficult Commandment, that is getting too near home, and there is silence. “The world of England to-day, despite its supposed irreligion and the emptying of our churches, is now more permeated than ever it has been by the spirit of clemency and justice, by the hatred of cruelty and oppression, and the determination, at all events

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among the masses, that there shall be equal rights for all men". So Mr Stacpoole perorates; and while we are enjoying the unconscious humour of that golden qualification, "at all events among the masses", let us not fail to notice the essential inadequacy of the consolation he offers us. Like his colleagues, he has replaced the Decalogue by a Pentologue.

IX

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IT was my fortune, some twenty years ago, to be bicycling late at night through the adorable county of Somerset, and to take the drink I had earned in a public-house lying on the outskirts of Bridgewater. It was there, in the public bar, that I heard two men arguing about the question of human immortality; and one of these, taking up a standpoint with which I was till then quite unfamiliar, maintained that he could conceive himself living a thousand years after death, or even more than that, but he could not conceive himself living to all eternity. The phrases I had overheard stuck in my memory, but it never occurred to me to make the generalization that the men of Somersetshire are lacking in the imaginative faculty. I do not say in intellect; I will not quarrel with the refrain of the song which assures us that "there bain't no noodles in Zummer-setsheer". But it did seem to indicate a curious inhibition of the power to dream, that extract from public-house philosophy. And then, the other day, a gentleman wrote to the *Daily News* from Taunton, greatly distressed to know where accommodation was to be found for the departed; in view of their large numbers, he found it difficult to see where there was room for them in so small

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a world as ours ; and taxed the clergy with shirking vital issues because they never seem to canvass this particular question in their pulpits. With all respect for the honest doubts of "A.J.C."—so he signed himself—I cannot but feel he had caught the imaginative myopia which seems to prevail in Arviragus's countryside. If you can imagine the soul once surviving death, why not imagine it continuing to survive? If you can imagine the soul freed from its material attachments, even temporarily, why boggle at the difficulty of housing it in infinite space?

As Governments fall back on a Royal Commission, so newspapers fall back on a symposium. The *Daily News* selected its jury, and a long series of articles followed ; distinguished (it must be confessed) by more careful writing and treatment than most of the other symposia. But in a sense it lies outside the proper scope of our study ; for the jury were very carefully empanelled, you might almost say packed ; there were comparatively few of the writers of whom you could not foretell with certainty whether they would vote for or against "survival". Three were Catholics ;¹ three were Spiritualists ; seven others at least

¹ I cannot forbear some allusion to the novel tendency—so it seems to me—of wanting to have the Catholic point of view represented in all these symposia. Dr Arendzen, Mr Belloc, and Mr Chesterton contributed to the series under discussion ; Mr Chesterton and Sir Philip Gibbs to *If I were a Preacher* ; Sir Philip Gibbs to *How I look at Life* ; the same author and Mr Evan Morgan to *I believe* ; Mr Compton Mackenzie to *My Religion*. I was not, I think, the only Catholic who wrote in *When I am Dead* ; and I know of yet

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were ministers of religion ; so that in a total muster of twenty-two it was pretty certain " the Whig dogs would not get the best of it ". Nor was literature as such largely represented. Mr Belloc wrote, and Mr Chesterton ; Mr Spender and Mr Lynd kept up the Fleet Street tradition ; Canon Hannay, to be sure, is George Birmingham as well as Canon Hannay, and Dr Glover, if he is President of the Baptist Union, is better known as a writer on classical subjects. But on the whole, the appeal was to specialists ; Sir Arthur Keith and Mr Huxley (I spare him the professorial title, to distinguish him from his grandfather) must have felt overwhelmed by the noise of a clerical opposition. A.J.C. had made a complaint about the " priests ", and it was natural that the editor should let them have their say.

I would sooner have quarried my material for this chapter from another symposium, to which I myself was invited to contribute—the series entitled *When I am Dead* in the *Sunday Dispatch*. We were a motley company ; I think I wrote either just before or just after Dame Nellie Melba. But alas, when I came to make inquiry about the fate of those articles, the Siren had turned Sibyl ; fugitive leaves, they had perished on the winds, and their wisdom was lost to posterity. The *Sunday Dispatch* (to put it more brutally) does not preserve its files when they are

another Catholic writer who refused a fantastic commission offered him if he would turn symposiast. Mrs Fry (Sheila Kaye-Smith) was not yet a Catholic when she wrote for *The Reality of Hell* and *If I were a Preacher*.

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more than two years old ; they are either given to the flames, or more probably boiled down, to make a clean sheet for other, fresh, deliveries of the human genius. Our philosophies of death had predeceased us ; our obituaries, I suppose, will only survive us by two years. *Debemur morti nos nostraque*, we who write in the *Sunday Dispatch*.

Yet these topographical speculations from the *Daily News*, garnered, fortunately, in a bound volume, will serve to illustrate my thesis and to justify my fears about our modern tendencies in religion. For even the professional spokesmen of religion take their colour, a little, from the prejudices of the public for which they write.

The voting in favour of a personal survival, or something which seems to the authors themselves equivalent to a personal survival, is 19 to 3. Sir Arthur Keith and Mr Huxley find an unexpected ally in Mr Arnold Bennett. All there is in him of municipal instinct revolts at the idea of accommodating the dead upon the surface of this planet ; yet the dead must have bodies, must therefore occupy space, and Mr Bennett cannot see his way to allotting them a position in space, whether in our own or in any other conceivable dimension. In view of these and other difficulties he concludes as follows : " I much prefer the theory so clearly and so succinctly stated by Sir Arthur Keith, in his address at Manchester University on 9th May 1928, that matter and spirit are indivisible, and that when the body loses its organized vitality what we call the soul loses its organized vitality too, and all is in time resolved into

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its original atoms". Which once more drives us back into wonderment over the question, What *did* Mr Bennett mean when he wrote, in *My Religion*, "On a balance of probabilities I am inclined to accept the theory of a future life"? Is it too much to ask that Mr Bennett should keep his religious convictions filed somewhere on a card-index, so that his secretary may have easy access to them when occasion arises?

The remaining writers take their stand on the side of the angels, but I confess that I sometimes find embarrassment in such championship. For one thing, I do wish that they would make it clear from the outset whether they are assuming the existence of any kind of revelation, and if so, which of their arguments are based on it. Mr Huxley makes an ingenious attempt to rule revelation out of court. The scientist, he tells us, "believes in Truth, and not merely truth of logic . . . but truth laboriously built upon fact, tested by observation in experiment, and capable of verification by whoever will go to the trouble". He suggests, in fact, that all evidence must be verifiable on the same principles which determine the validity of a scientific experiment; without such evidence there can be no truth; Revelation, therefore, which is hearsay evidence, cannot take its place in the witness-box. But nobody, I imagine, is going to be taken in by this sort of appeal. For it restricts the notion of truth in such a way as to deny the name to all historical assertion. The assertion that Luther nailed up his ninety-five theses to the church door

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is true ; but it cannot be tested by observation in experiment ; it is not capable of verification by whoever will go to the trouble. Mr Huxley's definition would not allow us to call true any fact in the past, simply because it is in the past, not in the permanent nature of things. Now, the *direct* evidence about a life which is lived, *ex hypothesi*, in a different order of being from our own obviously cannot lend itself to laboratory treatment ; whatever view we take of the matter, it is clear that our instruments must fail here. Necessarily, then, the direct evidence about a future life must depend upon the word of somebody who possesses a knowledge beyond our reach ; involves, therefore, some kind of a revelation. I should have no grievance if Mr Huxley had said : " I discount revelation, because I have examined all the credentials of all the revelations, and found them fallacious ". With less candour, he has tried to discount revelation simply because it is revelation, and that is to ignore the whole conditions of the argument.

Surely it is evident that the controversy involved a double question ; that A.J.C. was really asking : (1) Are the dead still alive, and (2) *if so* what are the conditions of the life they enjoy ? Now, Question 1 is capable of merely philosophical discussion ; we may consider what we know of the soul, of the relation between *subject* and *object* which all knowledge involves, of our moral instincts, and so on ; we can (some think, at any rate) establish the contention that the soul has an indestructible nature ; and all this without any appeal to revelation at all. But the conditions

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under which the soul realizes itself in a new life *can* only be made known to us by revelation of some sort. You can, as Dr Arendzen points out, establish a case for survival, and a case for the view that our moral judgements are guaranteed by sanctions in a future life. But you cannot, apart from revelation, know whether the spirit survives embodied or disembodied, what kind or degree it will experience whether of pleasure or of pain.

Swedenborg will tell you of a future existence in which our spirits will be wholly and finally disembodied. Spiritualism will tell you of an existence in which our spirits will be from the first united to a body, albeit after a tenuous fashion. The Christian revelation will tell you of a disembodied state, followed by the reunion of our spirits with the body which is connatural to them. Between these you must judge, not by any intrinsic probability in the statements they make—for our minds have no apparatus enabling them to pass judgement upon such issues—but by the view you have formed as to the credibility of the witnesses concerned—Swedenborg, or the mediums, or the tradition of Christendom, as the case may be. Both prudence and candour demanded, it seems to me, that the authors who attempted to answer A.J.C.'s question from the Christian standpoint should emphasize this distinction between reason and revelation. We can prove to you after a sort (they would have said) that the human spirit survives after death; but where or how it survives is a matter which only a supernatural authority can inform us;

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and if the authority has been silent on this or on that point, if "something sealed the lips of that evangelist", then the fault is not ours, and we cannot be held responsible for our silence.

Instead of this, some of the contributors (it seems to me) have worked into their system fragments of the Christian appeal, without explicit appeal to authority, and have muddied the waters of controversy in doing so. Thus Mr Rhondda Williams: "Jesus himself heightened and enriched the conviction of immortality, not by what he said directly on the subject, but by intensifying the sense of value of the human soul". Now, if we are arguing merely by the light of the natural reason, what argument can be derived from the fact that the Galilean Prophet intensified the value of the human soul? This means, presumably, that those persons who believed him to be God were led, through his teaching, to attach a higher value to the human soul than they had before—but were they right in doing so? If on the other hand we treat him as the Source of a Revelation, then we know for certain that he not merely attached great importance to the human soul but believed it to be imperishable.

Dr Glover gives more marked evidence of the same tendency. Towards the end of his article he writes: "For my own life and thought, I find I lay more and more stress upon the authority of Christ. I go by the authority of the expert, where I cannot test the evidence myself. In this matter of immortality as of some others (such as pain)

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I base much on the fact that he at all events did believe in Immortality, and that he based himself here on a more intimate insight into God than most of us have reached". Now, there is something to be said for the argument, supported with characteristic grace of manner by Mr Robert Lynd, that "the chief argument for the immortality of the soul is . . . the character of the men who have asserted it. The belief in immortality is not a superstition of savage tribesmen that gradually fades as the human mind develops. . . . It seems to be strongest, indeed, in those ages in which imagination is strongest". Is this all Dr Glover means? The reference to our Lord as an "Expert", and the handsome recognition conveyed by the words "most of us", would suggest that he is arguing here (doubtless *ad hominem*) on a purely humanitarian doctrine of our Lord's Personality. But surely it is darkening counsel to refer in the first sentence to the "authority of Christ", as if revelation were to be taken into account, and then to amplify the sentiment in a way which attaches to Christ exactly the importance which Mr Lynd attaches to Plato. Was Christ guessing, or did he *know*? That, surely, is the plain man's comment; and the ambiguity of the phrase makes him suspect that these Christians do not really know their own minds.

Another point which these symposiasts emphasize, surely, less than it deserves, is the fact that we attribute immortality, not to animal life as such, but to animal life endowed with intellect. The assertion we are out to contradict, as Mr

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Belloc notices, is that "the death of man and beast is one, and the condition of both is equal". We do not claim that when we shoot a rabbit we are deciding the destinies of an immortal soul. Hence (it seems to me) the very foundation of our argument must be an insistence on the fact that intellectual life is different in kind, not merely in degree, from life which is merely animal. I hope I may be pardoned for quoting a few words of my own contribution to the rival symposium, by way of making this point clear: "Man has that capacity for becoming the object of his own thought, which we call intellect; and the intellectual processes, as such, have no specific counterpart in the material organisation of his brain. The intellect, then, is given to us in experience as a non-material fact. There is a spiritual element in me—or rather, I am a spirit as well as a body—and I should think it as unreasonable to suppose that my spirit ceases to exist when I die as to suppose that my body ceases to exist when I die. The matter of me and the spirit of me are both *there*; only the spirit, it seems, must find a different *there* to persist in".

It follows that any argument in favour of immortality which is based on the general nature of life weakens its own case, unless the person who urges it believes in the immortality of the brutes. For instance, you could not base the doctrine of immortality on man's merely physical repulsion to the act of dying, since the brutes, if we may trust their outward behaviour, share the experience. It hardly needs to be said that Sir Arthur Keith entirely

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neglects this side of the question. For him "life" and "spirit" appear to be one. "Life as we know it", he says, "has always a material basis; a physiologist cannot imagine how life could be possible apart from matter". And he objects to the notion of death as a separation between body and spirit on the same grounds: "If death is due . . . to the escape of an immaterial spirit, we should expect the exodus to be instantaneous, whereas we find it to be a process of piecemeal". Nobody is concerned to deny—certainly not the theologians—that the moment of physical death is difficult to determine, and that cellular life survives after the heart has ceased to beat; that is why a priest will give conditional absolution after the moment of apparent death. But it is not surprising to us that we cannot detect the precise instant at which the soul leaves the body; for the soul, the principle of intellectual life, is *ex hypothesi* immaterial, and neither its coming nor its going could possibly be marked by scientific observation. It is the same at the other end of the scale. It is no news to us that "human beings begin as products of the womb"; did Sir Arthur really suppose that it had been left for twentieth-century biologists to discover this obscure fact? We do not profess to know at what precise moment the intellectual soul is infused into the yet unborn body, hitherto a mere animal; we should not expect to know, because the soul is an immaterial principle, and has no physical reactions which advertise its presence to the outside observer—its organs of expression are purely animal organs. It is possible

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(as we shall see) that the spiritualists are to blame for giving Sir Arthur the impression that we claim immortality for all animal life ; but at least he might have distinguished the tenets of Christianity from theirs.

Mr Huxley goes a little deeper into the matter ; the biologist gets nearer to the centre of things than the anatomist. But even he relies chiefly on the old contention that spirit is entirely “ dependent ” on matter ; why else can shock, idiocy, etc., due to physical causes, disturb the operations of the reason ? But this, of course, does not really touch our position ; we have always admitted that, in our present life, spirit depends on matter for its means of *self-expression* ; we do not see any reason to admit that it depends on matter for its *existence* ; nor (we claim) is such a dependence ultimately thinkable. And the lunatic is not one whose intellectual principle has ceased to exist, but one whose intellectual principle finds inadequate means of expression—it is in the position of one who plays the right notes on an instrument which is out of tune. However, satisfied that the mind depends on the body, Mr Huxley tries to take a step forward while we are not looking. He tells us that “ the body, which is the material frame of a human being, and the mind, with which he thinks and feels, are only two aspects of the single reality, the living human individual himself ”.

It would pass muster, that sentiment, in a hasty reading ; but you have only to consider it for a moment to realize the fallacy. When we talk about a thing having two

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aspects, we mean that our minds have deliberately made one thing into two, by looking at it from two different points of view successively. Thus, if I see a red triangle, I can so concentrate my attention as to turn it into a blotch of colour, or I can so concentrate my attention as to turn it into a mere mathematical figure. But the thing is the same all the time, regarded as an object of experience ; it is my approach to it which has introduced the difference. Whereas the mind and the body are *given to us in experience* as two distinct things ; we are aware of the one by an inner, of the other by an outward experience. They are not two aspects of the same thing, arbitrarily distinguished from each other ; they are two distinct facts of experience which, by an amazing but necessary synthesis, we know to be mysteriously one.

Having thus easily disposed of the difficulty by ignoring its terms, Mr Huxley falls back on precisely the same method as Sir Arthur ; asks us whether we are prepared to recognize a soul in the newt, the worm and the jelly-fish, and then proceeds to dilate on the evolution of the human foetus—assumes, in fact, that animal life and the life of the soul are coextensive. And so he decides, not, like Sir Arthur, in favour of complete materialism, but in favour of what we may call super-panteism. Something, it seems, takes place at death ; “ spiritual or mental activity is not lost, but all of it returns, in some way not yet understood, to a store or pool of spiritual reality which is the non-material counterpart of energy ”. Such is his message of comfort to the

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bereaved. Is this immortality? If so, I suppose I must say that my articles in the *Sunday Dispatch* achieve immortality when, duly pulped, they reappear in next month's *Bradshaw*.

It is hardly necessary to insist that Mr Huxley has only found this solution possible because he treats the intellectual principle in man as a mere function of the animal life. That this sentient physical energy which we share with the brutes may conceivably exist in a limited quantity, and that each separate unit of it returns to depot, so to speak, when it has finished its business of vitalizing this or that animal frame—all this is possible, though I do not see that Mr Huxley has given us any reason for thinking it plausible. But that intellectual principle of which we are conscious in the act of thinking has no such affinities. We meet it in experience as a lonely, isolated unit, fenced round with walls of personality, incapable of direct communication (even) with other created spirits, if indeed any other spirits exist besides this one. And to think of it as a drop out of a reservoir which must return one day to the reservoir is to deny practically everything we know about it.

But I did not set out to cross swords with the critics of survival; my business is with the methods of its defenders. And the defenders whose aid I distrust in this matter are the Spiritualists. It is difficult to be sure of their philosophy, but it does seem to me as if they believed animal life, as such, to be inextinguishable. Thus Mr Blatchford, after quoting an authority who says that the lower vertebrates

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appeared during the primordial epoch, "which was the age of the skull-less animals", triumphantly concludes: "How then can we say that the brain is the seat of life, or that the brain is the man?" But his contention only goes to prove that *animal* life does not depend on a material brain for its existence. Granted, but has he proved that *intellectual* life does not depend on the brain for its existence? And that, surely, is what we have to assert, if we are to accept the common doctrine of human immortality. Does Mr Blatchford accept Mr Huxley's *reductio ad absurdum* which would attribute immortality to the amœba? Sir Arthur Conan Doyle certainly believes in a future life for animals, though he characteristically confines it to those animals whose neighbourhood our human prejudices find agreeable.

I do not say that the individual survival of all animal life is unthinkable, although it would certainly aggravate A.J.C.'s housing problem very considerably. I only say that this method of reasoning robs us of our best piece of armour in the controversy; robs us of the one argument which, among all the mass of "suasions" which help us to believe in immortality, does really carry something more than a cumulative weight. I mean the argument which I have outlined above, that the personal spirit of man, his thinking Ego, belongs to a world beyond matter, and those material things of which it is the spectator; that it is given to us in experience as a simple, immaterial substance, and has no need, consequently, to anticipate dissolution. This each man can say of himself, from his own inner experience;

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can presume in his neighbour, because his neighbour's outward reactions—speech, gesture, and so on—suggest a similarity of organization. He cannot legitimately presume it in the brutes, because he has no such commerce with them as will yield him a reasonable certainty. And this life, which we share with the brutes—what is it? Sir Arthur Keith does not know; but then, neither does Mr Blatchford; it is given to us wrapped up (so to speak) in a parcel of conscious personality, from which we cannot detach the string. If it were revealed to me that I was no more and no less immortal than my friend's dog, you would not catch me banking a farthing on eternity.

The third underlying fallacy of which I find traces in *Where are the Dead?* is the fallacy (or so it seems to me) of thinking that you can make sentiment do instead of argument; a favourite thesis, as we have seen, with the symposiasts. It is easy, I mean, when you are conducting a newspaper controversy before an audience which is amenable to the pathetic appeal, to exclaim: "I cannot *prove* immortality; but I have something better than proof, I have a direct consciousness of it. And I have felt that consciousness on such and such occasions, when I have loved and lost. Love told me, then, that I shall be reunited with the person whom I loved". I say this is an easy form of procedure, but it is not valid; it does not carry the weight put on it. As Mr Belloc says: "The idea that a belief in immortality is a consolation, though perhaps an indication of truth, is worthless for intellectual conviction.

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To trust in consolations alone is as base intellectually as taking drugs, and as worthless ”.

We must make a distinction here. It is quite legitimate to plead, for what it is worth, that if there is no future life we can give no account of all the “loose ends” which our present life involves; that man’s appetite for eternity becomes a pointless and inexplicable waste product, if there is in fact no eternity to satisfy it. Both Mr Belloc and Dr Arendzen bring forward this “suasion” to assist their contentions. But to make such a plea is to base an argument on our sentimental experience, not to substitute our sentimental experience for argument. My quarrel is only with those writers who (mostly, it must be confessed, by way of subsidiary proof) give the impression that in a controversy of this kind you must throw argument overboard altogether. That is to dethrone reason, and bring religion into disrepute.

I will not give instances in detail; it would be a cruel task, where so much personal feeling is involved. Let me only quote extracts to illustrate what I mean. Mr Sheppard, who sets out by assuring us that “in this direct age half-answers and loose thinking can have no place”, has reached by his third paragraph the conclusion that “there comes a time . . . when . . . a man comes to the certain knowledge that with the intellect he can prove nothing”. And accordingly he appeals to a kind of direct intuition: “When we remember these people whom we loved, and . . . the deep peace that came over their dear

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faces as they lay dying and dead, we may surely vow that somehow, somewhere, the dead are in the hands of Love". Dr Glover, though to be sure he is really engaged in applying the "loose-ends" argument, shows traces of the same tendency: "During the War a man spoke with me one day of his daughter, killed in some hospital accident; *I would give all that I have to be sure I should see her again*, he said. That was just love; and I think that love is evidence—evidence that needs to be examined. Two things stand out; it is love that clamours for Immortality, for renewed intercourse with the beloved; and it is on love, with this unfathomed (unexamined?) instinct that human life and human society rest". The context, perhaps, saves this passage from the charge of sentimentalism; but in itself, does it not overdo the *tremolo*? And Mr Walpole, as we have seen in a previous chapter, is even more pronounced in his appeal to a non-rational proof. "One's history", he writes, "is individual; you cannot deny the emotions that you are given because others have not felt those emotions; and when you have found that many besides yourself have had exactly similar experiences, you are forced to agree that some element that is not material seems to intermingle constantly with human life". And he goes on, as we saw, to assert that "if it were definitely proved to me beyond shadow of doubt that Sir Arthur Keith's words were true, even then I should not believe it".

By all means let every man cling to every plank which offers itself to him, rather than sink under the waves of

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doubt. But I question whether we are not doing religion, in its widest sense, a disservice when we appeal to a merely emotional experience in its support. Love, even human love, always thinks itself eternal, but we know that in fact it does not always last a lifetime. We may, of course, get rid of that objection by telling ourselves that a man or a woman who falls out of love (so to speak) has never really loved at all. But is not this to beg the whole question? As a matter of experience, does not the love which "clamours for immortality" prove, often enough, to be calf-love after all? You may argue if you will from the existence of the emotion to the existence of spiritual qualities in man. But to appeal to the emotion itself is hazardous; you are appealing to a state of mind; and if the modern psychology has any value it lies, I think, in teaching us to distrust our states of mind. It would not be slow to label our mere craving for immortality a Tithonus complex.

We shall not increase respect for religion among the general public if we encourage the suspicion that men only believe in what they want to believe in, and only because they want to believe in it. Nor is there any department of theology over which that suspicion is more widely entertained than the doctrine of personal survival after death. Those who anticipate punishments as well as rewards after death, and live in the light of that creed, may be set down as fanatics, but at least they will be given credit for sincerity in their convictions. The philosophy

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of the symposiasts, as we shall see abundantly in the next chapter, is one which minimizes, if it does not abolish, the prospect of punishment, while it dwells on the hope of reward. And the more that philosophy gains ground, the more (it seems to me) will religion be set down by the ordinary man as a fad of the leisured and the middle-aged, a graceful fantasy which has no root in reality, and no claim on the homage of the unaddicted conscience.

X

BUNGLING UP DAMNATION

I SUGGESTED in my last chapter that no discussion about the after life can get beyond a certain point unless you are prepared to bring Revelation into the witness-box. It is evident that this principle applies with all the more strictness, if the matter of your debate is the existence of eternal punishment. Over such an issue, natural theology can only betake itself to guess-work, and its guesses have peculiarly little value. Those thinkers, of course, for whom the existence of God is no more than a hypothesis, or who admit his existence, but set limits to his powers according to the caprice of their own fancy, commonly reject hell as out of keeping with their own principles, from the very outset. The Supreme Being enjoys, in their thoughts, a kind of constitutional Monarchy, limited by the will of those whose thinking lends him Existence ; eternal punishment would be an abuse of his Prerogative—they would withdraw their intellectual support rather than admit it. But those who profess definitely their belief in a God, yet refuse to argue at all about his Nature, because that would be “dogma”—it is a little difficult to see how these people can be otherwise than agnostics about hell. To say “God is so good that he could

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not punish people eternally", is already to be guilty of dogma.

Once, however, you take the Christian revelation into account, the whole question develops a curious simplicity. There are three possible attitudes, which fall easily into syllogistic form. You may argue, as Christians have argued for centuries before you, thus :

Christ was a true Prophet ;

Christ believed in eternal punishment ;

Therefore eternal punishment exists.

Or you may take up the position forcibly urged by Mr Russell in his tract about why he is not a Christian, thus :

Eternal punishment does not exist ;

Christ believed in eternal punishment ;

Therefore Christ was not a true Prophet.

Or finally, with many good people who are anxious to save the reputation of Christianity, you may substitute this :

Eternal punishment does not exist ;

Christ was a true Prophet ;

Therefore Christ did not believe in eternal punishment.

And when you have said this, you have practically exhausted the possibilities of the discussion. So certain are the third party of their major premiss, that no amount of quotation, whether from the Bible or from the fathers, will induce them to revise their conclusion. And I suppose that its insistence on the reality of hell is one of the three chief reasons which prevent men, in our time, from joining the Catholic Church.

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What strikes me about the *Daily Telegraph* symposium on *The Reality of Hell* is that the contributors, instead of arguing the matter from the standpoint of Revelation on one or other of these formulas, showed a curious tendency to talk all round the subject without revealing, except to the most patient and careful reader, what views they *did* hold. They do not seem to have made allowance for that large public which, in these busy days, hardly gets beyond the head-lines of any newspaper article, and refuses to follow any but the most plain and the most brutal statement of a position. I except, of course, Abbot Butler, who wrote as an orthodox theologian. Perhaps if the contribution from the Dean of St Paul's, which the editor originally promised, had actually seen the light, we might have had an equally plain statement from a different angle. As it was, the Dean of Durham took his place; and though he speculates at first on the exact significance of the word *Gehenna* in a way which seems to foreshadow a "liberal" solution, he does not pursue the subject, but wanders off into speculations of his own.

Those speculations are beyond me. Bishop Welldon prefaces them with the words: "The simple fact that the future life is timeless is in itself enough to dispel the nightmare of eternal punishment. To say so is not to say that the punishment which a man endures may not continue so long as his resistance to the will of God endures", and so on. I confess that I have not sufficient agility of mind to follow the argument. If the eternity into which our

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souls are plunged at death is a timeless one, in any intelligible sense, then surely it is also a changeless one? For time is the measure of change, and a change which does not take place in time is unthinkable. On the hypothesis, then, if the soul once begins to be punished, it must go on being punished, changelessly; or rather "go on" is a false expression; the soul finds itself outside time, in a timeless and changeless condition of suffering. Whatever nightmares this prospect dispels, it hardly seems consonant with the notions of gradual purification which the Dean proceeds to develop. Where he gets his assurance that the future life has no time conditions, I do not know; but surely if he is going to open on that assumption, he must stick to it.

But it is not my province to argue theology with the pundits. My business is with the literary people, who reflect and to a certain extent create the views of the plain man. It is to Mr Warwick Deeping that we must turn for a typical treatment of the subject. He has no hesitation in sweeping away traditional views. "To the (early) Christian, poor man and slave, with his self-conscious exalting of humanity and poverty, it would seem natural to postulate a future life in which the fortunes of this life would be reversed. The rich and haughty should frizzle in torment, and Lazarus lie in Abraham's bosom. But, taking the medieval conception of hell, one realizes its potency, its priestcraft. It was a conception of power. It was used to coerce and to dominate. Its red fire could

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be displayed to the credulous. Into it could be pitchforked the refractory and the argumentative, these troublesome people who had visions and asked questions. Hell was the crucible in which an established cult melted down contradiction. It was the hell of coercion". Quite so ; all that kind of thing. Mr Deeping does not tell us, and probably he did not know, whether he meant the hell of primitive Christianity to be one thing, and the hell of the medievals another. He just takes it for granted, with the dreary dogmatism of the symposiast, that you have to treat the early Christians as good fellows in the main, though stupid, and the medievals as priest-ridden victims of superstition, from which they made vain efforts to break loose. He probably did not reflect that primitive Christianity was quite as loud as medieval Christianity in its condemnation of the heretic, or that the medieval pictures of hell are never complete without a Pope in them, and a bishop or two. He did not even read Dante, to see what sort of people Dante sent to hell. It is quite safe, Mr Deeping felt, to sling what mud you like at the Middle Ages, without verifying your references ; nobody minds, except those negligible Roman Catholics.

The hell of the priests, he tells us, has passed. " Man is his own priest, and his hells and heavens are personal. They are now and in the nearby future. . . . What is hell for the wise man but the realization of his own failure ? " Failure not, of course, in the sense of material failure, but rather " a loss of faith in his essential inevitable self.

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It is consciousness of sin, and sin is a reality". His idea of hell, then, is, "that of a lonely old man standing on the edge of the unknown and looking back on the past". "To remember traitorous false moments. To remember the savage slaver of sex and never the saving grace of the greater love". In short, "Hell is to look back at the dim, reproachful faces of those who loved us, those whom we betrayed".

Of course, it reads well. It costs a practised author little trouble to grind out this sort of stuff. But what the article comes to, when you boil it down, is just this: "I do not believe in all that stuff about punishments in a future life, such as you get in the Bible and in the Christian tradition; nobody does nowadays. So I believe that the worst and the only punishment we get for sin is that, if we live to old age, we find ourselves feeling cads about it". That is Mr Deeping's creed, and I can think of dozens who would have said the same. It repays study, on several heads.

In the first place, we may notice that Mr Deeping is trying to frighten us. He seems to blame, obscurely, the medieval priests for terrorizing their congregation into a certain course of behaviour by threatening them with hell. He is doing exactly the same, when he tries to terrorize his readers with the threat of remorse in what he calls, very hideously, "the nearby future". In spite of all the enlightenment of our age, in which he believes with the hearty simplicity of the symposiast, he finds that he

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has to put up some bogey to frighten it ; he cannot trust it to do the right thing just for the sake of doing the right thing ; there must be punishments, even if moral torment is the best he can provide for us. John Stuart Mill has lived and died, and still the human race cannot be trusted to do the right thing merely for the love of it ; it must be bludgeoned into good behaviour by a system of rewards and punishments, albeit on earth. We have got back to the position of Cephalus in the first chapter of the *Republic*, who is content to rest the sanction of moral action in the prospect of an untroubled old age.

In the second place, let us observe that Mr Deeping's terrors are superstitious ; they are the superstitions of the literary man. Gigadibs is accustomed to directing the destinies of his puppets as he wills ; and this long habit of empire encourages him to transfer these arrangements from the pages of his own works to the canvas of real life. I do not mean that our authors nowadays make the villain die an uncomfortable death, while the hero and heroine live happily ever afterwards ; we have got beyond all that. Indeed there are no villains and no heroes exactly ; but at the end of the book all the survivors are found looking back with regretful retrospect over wasted lives, sorry they married the people they did, and sorry that they divorced them. This eminently just retribution is not, of course, put down to the influence of any such Powers as an older theology preached ; it is all due to an imaginary machine which they call Fate. But everybody is uncomfortable by

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the end of the book, and everybody deserves to be uncomfortable, and there you are. It is the modern substitute for melodrama.

Mr Deeping, after throwing over religion, has attempted to replace it by melodrama—understood in this new sense. He clearly thinks it certain that anybody who is guilty of mean behaviour—and that, for the moderns, is the only sin—will be gnawed by intolerable remorse in later life. MEMORIES THAT SCOURGE ; it makes a good head-line, but does it always happen? If somebody had written an article in this series, claiming that there were no rewards or punishments in a future life, but it was worth while being good all the same, because all bad people fall over precipices, while the good live to a happy old age and die worth thirty thousand, what should we have said? Surely that our author was mistaking fairy-stories for real life. Is it not equally true that Mr Deeping is mistaking sex novels for real life? Do we all live to regret our past? Every day, in London alone, some half a dozen people are killed in motor accidents, and escape, by that simple method, the hell with which Mr Deeping threatens them. And is it even certain that all those who achieve old age retain sufficient tenderness of conscience to care much about the distant sins of their youth? Upon my word, the suggestion that all sins are paid for by remorse seems to me about as superstitious as the notion that it always rains when you forget to take out an umbrella.

And there is a further point—even if we do pay by

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remorse, do we pay enough? Is it certain that Nero, by those last tremors which seized upon his agitated mind before the slave dispatched him, paid for all the misery he had brought into the lives of his fellow-creatures? I do not say it is impossible ; there is, after all, no standard by which we can measure mental suffering. But as a matter of common sense is it *probable* that the company promoter who has ruined thousands of innocent victims feels anything like an equivalent stab before the pistol goes to his head? I am not arguing here in favour of the probability that punishment awaits us after death ; I am simply asking what right Mr Deeping has to talk about hell, when all he means by it is a general feeling, towards the end of life, that we have made a mess of things. I say it is a symptom of a neurotic age, and an age debauched by literature, that such a misuse of words should be possible to us. Mr Deeping does not believe in hell ; he had only to say so. There was nothing to write an article about.

A still more curious account of what hell is comes from Professor Irwin Edman, assistant professor of philosophy at Columbia University. His article is written "from the standpoint of those thousands of informed contemporaries to whom God, Heaven and Hell in the traditional sense have no meaning save as the expression of a mythology in which science and conscience both forbid them to believe". One is tempted to wonder why this thinker should have gone any further ; it is all we wanted to know. But he is determined to give us full measure ; after all,

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you can make some sense of God and Heaven if you set your mind to it: "He is love; he is aspiration; he is ideality; he is man's image of his own goodwill, as Heaven is an objectification of his own good hopes. God becomes the metaphor for the humanitarian intention; Heaven the metaphor for the humanitarian ideal". Precisely; it is convenient to have a metaphor like *God* for the humanitarian intention; it saves you the trouble of trying to explain what exactly the humanitarian intention may be. It is convenient to have a metaphor like *Heaven* for the humanitarian ideal, because *Heaven* at least gives a concrete idea, although to the Professor it is only an imaginary one, whereas "the humanitarian ideal" is only a phrase, which one strongly suspects of having no meaning whatever. With this Humpty-Dumpty-like capacity for making words mean exactly what he chooses they shall mean, is it not possible that the Professor will find some useful niche in his vocabulary even for "the outmoded horrors of hell"?

And sure enough he does. "To be in hell has in the theological tradition been to live without vision of the good. How many for whom the old canons are abolished, and who have no new ones to live by, know the horror, blank and paralysing, of living without a vision of a good which could give a meaning to life!" Poised uncomfortably between the consolations of an older system, which has ceased to command their intellectual assent, and those more durable ones which a course at Columbia University might

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have supplied, they experience the dilemma of Tantalus. "What age ever had more individuals who did not know where they were going and felt themselves lost utterly, beyond the hope of any salvage? What age ever had more persons who could not, hard though many of them try, give a meaning to their lives, or attribute one, however desperately they try, to the world in which they live or the actions which they do?" And the Professor concludes that, while hell has ceased to be credible as a section of another world, "only the bovine or the dishonest would deny its reality in the diurnal life lived on the indubitable earth under the sky, so actual, so uncaring, and so blue".

It seems a pity to spoil such a peroration by any comment; but really, has not Professor Edman let his feelings run away with him a little? There can be no question that a few souls have to undergo, in each generation, a martyrdom of the intellect, but is it really so common as the above-quoted paragraphs imply? And why call it hell? It may be legitimate, in the way of metaphor, to apply the term to any particularly uncomfortable experience. Just so you may refer to a chorus-girl as a fairy, or unemployment as a spectre, but it is not worth the trouble of alluding to these conventional expressions if you are asked whether you believe in fairies, or in ghosts. Reading and re-reading this curious contribution to human thought, I am more than ever impressed by the fact that so many of our contemporaries suppose you can put across any

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kind of stuff you like when you are asked to write about religion. There is no other connexion, I believe, in which the newspaper public would sit down under such a flood of aimless rhetoric doing duty for thought.

I am sorry to say that I cannot make head or tail of Sir Oliver Lodge's article ; there is no point at which it becomes clear to me whether those higher and lower states of being which he identifies with paradise and hell respectively are supposed to exist before or after what we ordinary people call death. I confess that I should have expected more definite information from a cult which so largely centres its interest in a future life, and claims such exceptional opportunities for information. Mrs Annie Besant is less cryptic ; her " Real Hell " is plainly located in a future existence, the next incarnation, in fact, after our present one. It is of course only a kind of Purgatory, and not a particularly menacing one. " Where you have done certain types of wrong to another, like a murder, you have a terrible experience of committing the crime over and over again. Also, if the murdered person was about in your own stage of evolution, you meet him after your own hanging ; and the meeting is not pleasant, for you are at a disadvantage on such occasions ". One sees that it would be embarrassing, but really, is there no more to it than that ? " Suicide, again, keeps you in the real hell for an extra period, for you have to remain there till the time for which your physical body was built is completed, and you are neither comfortably alive nor comfortably dead ".

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Impossible not to feel, somehow, that Dante made a better job of it.

The writers from whom I have quoted are not by any means representative. On the whole, I think the report of this particular commission is surprising. It is true, organized religion was highly represented in its constitution ; it is true that its finding is against eternal punishment, though by a curiously narrow majority. But all alike, even Mrs Besant, even Sir Oliver Lodge, are concerned to provide us with some substitute for it, some future terrors which will at least make us stop and think. And I take this for an omen that the religion of pure kindness, the religion of the symposiasts, has already failed. The writers on hell, even the least orthodox of them, realize that religion, if it is to be effective, must have ballast ; that mere uplift and optimism will cut the ropes which bind theology to the earth, and divorce it from the daily needs of common life. I wish that the conveners of the *My Religion* symposium had asked especially for views on this subject, or that the *Sunday Dispatch* articles on *When I am Dead* had survived the two years of their mortality. As it is, we must be content with the views of a more conservative jury as illustrating a tendency towards reaction. They are afraid, I think, of a laxer morality proving the outcome of our looser theologies, and I think they are right. Indeed, I should not be surprised if it is by that door that religion comes back to us.

XI

GIGADIBS OR SLUDGE?

THE reader will have noticed, and perhaps been inclined to complain, that in the preceding chapters I have said very little about the Spiritualists, and the testimony which they claim to bear. I have deliberately reserved them for a separate chapter, because in their methods of searching for religious truth they differ so widely from the other authors under discussion. Whether they differ much in the results they achieve, we shall now have the opportunity of considering.

I count it among the most curious religious phenomena of our day that Spiritualism, as a religion, has had so little success. Here you have a nation whose mind, for all practical purposes, is a *tabula rasa*, waiting to receive any new religious impressions without preconceived prejudice. You have, if the newspaper account of the matter is true, a generation that is broken-hearted at the loss of its old faiths, pining for some new religious inspiration. A new revelation springs into being, which offers concrete evidence, almost tangible evidence, of a life beyond the grave. A great war sweeps over Europe, and thousands of homes are left widowed or orphaned. Could there be a better seed-ground for such a message? And yet Spiritualism,

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as a religion, is still an exotic cult, a fad of the suburbs and of the less influential Midlands. Why has it not swept the board with its powerful and respectably supported propaganda?

The answer is a simple one, if we may believe that the symposiasts are typical of the general public. The symposiasts, it seems to me, repudiate Spiritualism simply because it is a revelation, and they do not want a revelation. It offers them evidence, and they do not want evidence; they feel finer fellows, somehow, if they can manage to believe with no evidence at all. To accept any views at second-hand, even from the best accredited supernatural agencies, would spoil the incommunicable certainties of Mr Walpole and Miss West. They are deaf to proof as to disproof; Sir Arthur Keith shows them an empty coffin, and they still insist there is something there; Sir Arthur Conan Doyle produces an apparition out of it, and they look the other way. To produce evidence is not cricket.

If we must assign a cause, in its turn, to this paradoxical attitude of theirs, I have always believed that it arises from an inherited tradition of Protestantism. That religious movement, particularly where it is most true to itself, and follows its own conclusions logically, makes faith consist in an act purely of the will, not of the reason; a jump in the dark, a hand stretched out blindly. And this notion has, so it seems to me, left a tradition in the blood of the English people; has accustomed them to thinking of

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religious truth as something which makes no appeal to the intellect, but claims an emotional adherence. They almost hold it wrong to *think* about religion. And accordingly, while the Bible and the Protestant tradition were thought self-evidently true, this capacity for acceptance found its Object in the Person of our Lord ; since the break-down of these certitudes in the public mind, the same capacity for acceptance reaches out blindly for whatever Object remains, after Science and History have done their worst. It snatches at the bare idea of God, at the bare notion of survival, at the bare hope that Good is ultimately a triumphant force. I think it will sometimes go on *believing* when it has nothing left to believe ; just as the organs of the human body (if I may be pardoned for so crude an illustration) go on trying to digest, when you are fasting, the food that is not there. It is this phenomenon, I think, which accounts for the strange *in vacuo* religiosity of Mr Middleton Murry. There is a temperament that must continue to go through the motions of believing, even in the cage of materialism.

This, then, I take to be the fault in the spiritualistic appeal, the very point which at first sight seems most in its favour—the fact that it offers proof. Doubtless under the urgency of a present bereavement many minds appreciate the opportunity Spiritualism offers them of being in touch with the dead. But merely to be in touch with the dead does not constitute the whole of a religion ; it is evident, for example, that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle does not think

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so. And if you want to go any further than that, what does Spiritualism offer you? Only a series of statements, written by the hand of a medium or under the influence of "automatic writing", about the nature of God and of the spiritual world. And those statements the modern mind does not want. They are doctrines (or, as it would say, "dogmas"), something that has been taught; traditions, something that has been handed on to us from an external source. They are not convictions immediately implanted in the mind; they are believed by a process of reasoning, not by an immediate act of self-surrender. Accordingly the modern mind (if the symposiasts interpret it truly) does not indeed dispute the truth of such supernatural information, but brushes it aside; "*non tali auxilio*;" it says, "leave me to my certainties".

The debate over Spiritualism, as we know it, is a debate over its credentials. The common criticism runs something like this: "Yes, we quite see that there would be a great deal to be said for your doctrines, if we could believe that the source from which they emanate is trustworthy. But is it trustworthy?" And that question resolves itself into a series of three questions. (1) Since it is clear that deliberate fraud has sometimes been practised by mediums, how can we be certain that the whole thing is not fraud—that the mediums who have not been found out are not simply the mediums who were too clever to be found out? (2) Assuming that deliberate fraud, sometimes at least, is absent, how can we be sure that the messages

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which you receive really come from preternatural intelligences? May they not be derived, through laws hitherto obscure to mental science, from the sub-conscious minds of the persons who take part in the *séance*? (3) Granted that you are actually in touch with preternatural intelligences, *spirits*, as you call them, how can we discover whether those spirits are reliable or unreliable informants?

I intend, here, to prescind from all these questions, to leave the form of the Spiritualist revelation undiscussed, and concentrate attention upon its content. If the message is true, what articles does it propose for our belief? And, conversely, what light is thrown upon the probability of its truth by the nature of its disclosures? I do not mean, of course, that in the material from which this book is compiled you can obtain more than a rough summary of the Spiritualist teaching. But in this summary form, Spiritualism bulks largely; Sir Arthur Conan Doyle contributes to *My Religion*, *Where are the Dead?*, and *If I were a Preacher*; Sir Oliver Lodge to *Where are the Dead?*, to *The Reality of Hell*, and to a series in *Tit-Bits* which has no general title; there was also an article in *Where are the Dead?* by Mr Robert Blatchford. From a consideration of these items, we ought to be able to get some general picture of the doctrines for which Spiritualism stands.

Primarily, however, it is Sir Arthur we must trust as our spirit-guide. Sir Oliver is plainly somewhat embarrassed by the scientist's reluctance to treat hearsay information as evidence; his ideas, he claims, "have the value

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of a working hypothesis which can be tested and confronted with growing experience", but clearly not with direct experience, on this side of the grave. Accordingly, he confines himself in the main to the credentials; it is Sir Arthur who works out, with a candour we cannot but admire, the implications of his system.

The testimony thus furnished falls naturally under two headings: (1) that part of it which relates to the experiences of the dead after they have "passed over", and (2) that part of it which relates to the general truths of religion, and which they in turn have learned by hearsay from intelligences higher than themselves. "We can use our new powers", writes Sir Arthur, "not only to get into touch with our own loved ones, who may perhaps be on no higher a level of character and knowledge than ourselves, but also, when we are worthy, we get clear messages from those who are in a far more spiritual condition than ourselves, and are, indeed, what under the old dispensation would have been called high angels". Spiritualists, in fact, by now ought to be in a position to tell us about the truths of religion with hardly less assurance than we find in the writings of Swedenborg. For the present, however, let us confine ourselves to the experiences of the newly dead.

There are various questions which most of us would be disposed to ask if we found ourselves face to face with a *revenant*; and it is instructive to see how carefully all these questions are answered by the spiritualist revelation. I propose to ask those questions in order, and to show how

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carefully, and in what an encouraging temper, Sir Arthur answers them.

Is the act of dying painful? “Death itself is a sweet and pleasant languor, akin to that of the tired body dropping to sleep. . . . The etheric eyes become clearer while the bodily ones fade. . . . We are aware of the smiling faces and the outstretched hands of those whom we would most love to see again”.

Do any terrors meet us on the further side? “The average kindly man . . . is congratulated and reassured by the friends round him. . . . Then for a time there is Rest. When it is over he finds the same kind guardians by his side, who will introduce him to the glories and the duties of the new world which await him”.

What exactly does one find to do, as a disembodied spirit? “We find ourselves in an exceedingly busy and complex life, in which we have full scope for all the mental powers we possess. . . . The whole nature of the artist centres upon his art, of the musician upon his music, of the man of science upon his science”. (The case of the business man does not appear to be considered.)

Shall we meet everybody we knew on earth—relations, for instance? And in general, will our surroundings be congenial? “There is not such a mixing of jarring natures as upon earth, but those who are in sympathy are attracted together. Everything is therefore more peaceful and harmonious. Family ties only carry on as far as they are sympathetic”. This seems to raise an obvious difficulty about family and

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other affections which are not reciprocated on earth ; but perhaps these will be put right by a change of heart. “ The bond of sympathy and affection is the one permanent thing which regulates the reuniting or the sundering of those who have been in contact with each other down here. . . . Happy reassembled households are usual there, with all elements of discord removed ”. (Elsewhere, Sir Arthur seems to allow for the survival of animals whose companionship is grateful to man.)

Will children who die remain children? “ They are enabled to grow up among favourable surroundings ; there are good people there as there are here whose duty and pleasure it is to look after them ” (Sir Oliver Lodge). “ The picture of the places where the children grow to maturity is particularly beautiful ” (Sir Arthur Conan Doyle).

Do we remain permanently just as we are when we die, or do we progress? “ There is no sudden transition. . . . Mental progress has to be worked for there as here. . . . There is a Heaven, which is progressive, sphere above sphere ”. “ Do not suppose that this semi-material heaven is a final one. Nothing is final. We grow and grow through the ages ”.

Is there no punishment at all? “ There may be darker and grimmer places for those who have been positively wicked, and whose reformation can only be effected by punishment. It is always temporary, but would seem to be severe while it lasts ”. I do not know whether the words

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“physical pain is absent, though mental trouble, such as remorse, may continue” are meant to apply in this connexion.

I am afraid I must be unduly sceptical by temperament, but I must confess that these revelations arouse in me more suspicion than all the darkened rooms and the hugger-mugger; than any suppression of inconvenient messages, any apologizing for imperfect mediums and imperfect “controls”. Am I alone in the impression that *it is all too good to be true*, that it all allows too exactly for our earthly tastes, answers too exactly to the hopes which the ordinary man in the street would form, if he were permitted to create his own eternity for himself? This nursery division of the world into people who have been positively wicked and people who have not, into “the man who has lived for himself alone” and “the average kindly man or woman”; this guarded allusion to a bare possibility of punishment, with the certainty that it cannot be eternal, and all that only for “the positively wicked”, a class in which the reader is obviously not included—is it not typical of an age in which the moral sense has burned low, and the ideal of heroic sanctity has been replaced by an unadventurous, jog-trot aspiration after homely virtues? This allowance for the ruts of human temperament, promising to each that it shall go on doing the kind of things it has always been doing, with libraries and laboratories to aid it in the task, this provision of congenial company and even of pets—is it not admirably calculated to flatter us with

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the prospect of an eternity in which we shall not have the bother of becoming anything different from what we are? This vista of infinite progress, going on through interminable time—is it not a cheap way of avoiding the question what the full stature of humanity is? I do not say that the statements I have quoted above are impossible; of course they are not. I do say that I should be more inclined to believe the spirits if the spirits were not so careful to tell me exactly what I want to hear.

Let it be understood that I do not for a moment accuse Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, or any organization connected with psychical research, of having concocted this theology for themselves; of having suppressed evidence here, arranged it there, coloured it there, in such a way as to present an artificial whole. I have no doubt that it is the genuine result of patient investigation; that it faithfully represents the sense of the communications which are supposed to have been received at a whole multitude of *séances*. I say that this result is what I should have expected from any one of the three agencies to which psychic phenomena are attributable, conscious fraud, sub-conscious influence, or a real invasion of the preternatural. From any one, or from all three combined; I do not think that the nature of the results achieved gives us any ground for deciding between the various possibilities.

Let us suppose that the whole of these manifestations, or any part of them, can be traced to deliberate fraud—Sludge manipulating the ouija-board, Sludge pulling wires

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and faking gramophone records ; is it not certain that he will set out to give his audience their money's worth by telling them what they want to be told ? They are, or think themselves, a set of " average kindly men and women " ; of such, accordingly, is Sludge's kingdom of heaven ; he will flatter them subtly by not pretending that they are anything out of the common ; that they have nothing heroic or Quixotic in their constitutions ; they are plain folk, who want the transition to another world to be as quiet, as business-like, as uncatastrophic as possible. Not otherwise Sludge ; they have paid for their oracle, and the goods shall be delivered, even down to their pet dogs.

Or alternatively, suppose that there are forces at work in the *séance* which really exceed all that we know at present—and what do we know at present?—in the field of telepathy ; that the sub-conscious mind blossoms out under the influence, even to the extent of showing knowledge which the conscious mind has perhaps never realized, has perhaps forgotten. Is it not clear that this same sub-conscious mind, posed with questions about matters which are *ex hypothesi* outside its ken, will fall back for inspiration on the common dogmas of our age ; that a reminiscence of " Lead, kindly Light " will suggest the idea of " the smiling faces and outstretched hands of those who we would most love to see again " ; that the Dream of Gerontius will supply it with materials for the " kindly guardians " ; that the Prayer-book Collect for Peace will remind it of a happiness which " this world cannot give ",

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and so on ; that it will fish in the forgotten pools of childish imagination, and draw up such childish notions as are most comfortable to the middle-aged?

There remains a third possibility, that the agencies at work are (sometimes, at least) preternatural. It is the constant assumption of the Spiritualists that these are benevolent agencies, and therefore reliable ; but why should they be either? We have only their own word for it. For myself, I find it a far easier explanation to suppose that the purpose of their communications is to deceive us, and that they deceive us with a certain elementary ingenuity. To preach mere Satanism would revolt the human conscience ; therefore they are at pains to enforce ordinary morality ; nay, they will throw in a whole bunch of moral platitudes, of the kind our age loves, about unselfishness and honesty and kindness to animals. By means of such ground-bait, they are contriving to instil into the minds of the credulous a debauched notion of our human destiny, a bargain-basement eschatology which can lull our terrors without for a moment inspiring our consciences. But I shall be accused of a *parti pris* on my own side, no more defensible than that of the Spiritualists themselves. Be it so, then ; we will treat the “spirits” as indeterminate agencies, of whose character or reliability we have no external means of judging. Do the frequent records of their impish behaviour incline us to believe that they are responsible and accredited informants? If they could substantiate, as they cannot substantiate, their claim to be

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the spirits of the dead in person, we might form some estimate of their credibility. But, positing the existence of a spirit world, the possibilities of impersonation are plainly unlimited ; one or two pieces of private information, and the imitation of a tone of voice—are these beyond the scope of those Puck-like beings which rattle the furniture ?

But I am being led back into a discussion of the credentials ; my point is that, be the credentials what they may, the results obtained are not such as to confirm them, but such as to cast suspicion on them. The prospectus is too dazzling to produce conviction. And now, when they discuss matters of speculative interest, when they tell us what they have heard from those higher intelligences which correspond to angels, what theology have the spirits to teach us?

They teach us the theology of the symposiasts.

They share, with the moderns, that claustrophobia of the intellect of which I have spoken. “There is nothing narrow in such messages”, writes Sir Arthur. “Always the teaching is that belief and faith are small matters beside character and conduct”. And when, with great reluctance, he alludes to the possibility of punishment in a future life, he says: “We are taught that any narrowness of religious vision, or any limiting of mercy to this or that sect, is a dangerous mental condition which calls for correction”. And Sir Oliver’s hell, whatever and wherever it is, is especially for the thoughtless, the selfish, and the cruel ;

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I need hardly say that for an example of cruelty he flies at once to the theologians. For the spirits, as for the symposiasts, the one real sin is that of holding any definite religious opinions; they single it out, almost savagely, as if there were no other sins going about in this world of ours that were worth noticing. "All races and religions are on an equality" over there "so long as the individual . . . *is not too set on his dogmas*".

The spirits share with the moderns a great vagueness about the nature of God. "The great, kindly Spirit who yearns over the world which is His special care"—it would read better of a Gnostic Demiurge than of the Christians' God. I admit that Sir Arthur does better elsewhere: "Providence will prove to have been far kinder and less exacting than any orthodox theologian has imagined" (whatever that may mean), and again: "The religious sense is awakened and stimulated by the glories which surround the new-born soul. His love and adoration increase when it is understood how infinitely kind the Creator has been, and when the riddle of life's apparent injustices and cruelties has been partially solved". But these are the only references I find to the existence of a Supreme Being in his three articles; and Sir Oliver in his three articles makes no such allusion at all, except when he tells the readers of *Tit-Bits* that the great army of the dead are "doubtless subject to a Higher Power beyond our conception, which yet works by law and by physical means", which is not a very generous recognition of the

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Divine Sovereignty. We have seen above that religion, to the moderns, is no longer an attitude of mind towards a Person, but a mere attitude of mind;—whether there is a Person in the background to whom this attitude corresponds, hardly seems to matter. So with the spirits; they mention the existence of a Creator if it happens to fall in with what they are saying, but they do not dwell, they do not insist upon it. Whether there is a future life is for them more important than whether there is a God.

The spirits, like the moderns, repudiate the Divinity of Christ. “The wonderful thing”, Sir Arthur tells us, “is that by devious paths we have got back to Christianity once more, and that the Christ figure appears—to me at least—more beautiful and understandable than ever. The worst that any sect can do for him is to make him incredible. Now he appeared as a great heaven-sent Teacher living a life which was to be our example. That was surely enough without any question of a mystical atonement”. Notice that repulsive phrase, “the Christ figure”. It does not matter, you see, whether he ever lived, as long as he can be made to do duty for a copy-book Hero. Anything rather than that a mystical significance should be attached to his Life; anything rather than that he should appear (to a writer who has sponsored photographs of fairies in the public Press) “incredible”. “I have, if I may for a moment be personal, had more beautiful messages about the teaching and personality of Christ from my own guide Pheneas than I have ever had or heard from any source”.

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The admission stops there ; we are not allowed to form our own conclusion about these messages. I can quite believe that Sir Arthur thought them beautiful.

At the same time the spirits, with the moderns, are all in favour of what they call " the Christian teaching ", by which they mean, like the moderns, the teaching of humanitarianism, clothed in half-texts from the Gospels. Spiritualism " does not in any way touch on the ethics of Christ ". " It is not for our mosquito brains to say what degree of divinity was in him, but we can surely say that he was nearer to the Divine than we, and that his teaching is the most beautiful of which we have cognisance ". I would not, even if I were a mosquito, talk about " degrees " of divinity, but I can see what Sir Arthur means—that Christ was a man like ourselves, and that if you make a sufficiently careful selection from his recorded utterances, they are the sort of utterances which would appeal to any sensible man, whatever his religion. The spirits, according to Sir Oliver Lodge, " encourage our faith in goodness and unselfishness and mutual service, and in all the essentials of religion ". It is just what one would have expected of them.

Only one tendency of the symposiasts they do not encourage—the tendency to despair of human reason. Sir Arthur, who has written of " mosquito brains " just above, is quite prepared to be impressive about our " God-given human reason " elsewhere. " We do not accept such statements blindly. We are not visionaries or fanatics.

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We weigh the messages with our own God-given human reason". The difference is instructive. If we trusted entirely to immediate intuitions, then we could attach no value to the spirit messages, which come to us at second-hand. And we should not need the spirit messages; we could find out for ourselves that the unselfish life is the only really happy life, and that what we are is more important than what we do, and all those other startling discoveries to which the spirits are waiting to introduce us. And in that case the cult of Spiritualism might languish.

Many people will tell you that they are not going to be interested in Spiritualism until it can produce its results in a full blaze of electric light, before a hostile audience, under conditions arranged beforehand by its critics. For myself, I have a simpler though perhaps a more exacting standard. I am going to take an interest in Spiritualism when the spirits can manage to produce a poem that is worth reading, or a statement that is not obvious, or a truth we did not know before which afterwards is verified. Meanwhile I doubt the source because I doubt the stream. We can call spirits from the vasty deep, and they will come when we do call for them. Having come, they assure us in sepulchral tones that honesty is the best policy.

XII

WHAT IS TRUTH?

NOTHING seems more to obsess the thought of the symposiast than the idea that the human mind is, somehow, an imperfect instrument. We have just seen Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (who is, nevertheless, more of an intellectualist than the rest of them), talking about "mosquito brains". The same complaint meets us everywhere. "Why should I agitate myself over a matter which exceeds my mental powers? I do not agitate myself" (Mr Bennett). "These certainties of mine cannot be proved by any logical process" (Miss West). "My religion is the religion of the man in the street—an attitude of, I hope, reverent ignorance as regards the great unsolved problems of life and death" (Mr Oppenheim). "A man comes to the certain knowledge that with the intellect he can prove nothing" (Mr Sheppard). "Instead of vexing our minds with the metaphysics of men, we stay them, etc. etc." (Mr Douglas). "It is useless to ask me to define what precisely is the nature of the God in whom I believe. My apprehension of him is not made by my reason" (Mr Drinkwater). "When something in me gives its instant assent to all that has been said about God by the experts in God, . . . I have a strange feeling that that something is a higher, fuller, *wholer* entity

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than my paltry little reason" (Mr Raymond). And so on.

I confess that I find myself rather bewildered by this chorus of mistrust. If these gentlemen are not going to believe in their reasons, what on earth are they going to believe in, and why? Of course, if they accepted a revelation, it would be a different matter. A man who believes that God has revealed himself may logically exalt revelation at the expense of reason, and I can respect him even when I do not agree with him. Johannes Agricola, for example :

God, whom I praise—how could I praise,
If such as I might understand,
Search out, and reckon on his ways—

that is intelligible ; you are contrasting man's wisdom with the Wisdom of a God in whose existence your intellect believes. But the symposiasts do not seem to be bothering about that ; some of them, as I say, do not seem at all certain whether God exists or not. They just feel, somehow, that we men are all rather fools. Fools, yes, but in comparison with what? To talk about the puny intellect of man is as if you were to talk about the puny muscles of the elephant. An elephant may not be able to swim up a waterfall, but it is the most muscular beast we know ; Man may be incapable of solving certain problems, but he has the best brains, and indeed the only brains, in the visible creation. Why poke fun at him? Why not sit down and think out, in a cool hour, what are the possibilities

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of man's intellect ; how far it is an adequate instrument towards the attainment of Truth?

The symposiast uses his intellect, but uses it only to destroy the orthodox position, no further. He objects to traditional theology on the ground that it is unreasonable. The modern mind, he tells you, in these days of enlightenment, cannot bring itself to assent to all the crude dogmas which commended themselves to our ancestors. But why not, unless it finds them unreasonable? And how can it find them unreasonable except by the use of its reason? It is assumed, therefore, that the human reason is an adequate instrument, when its purpose is to destroy. Miss West gives us to understand that the doctrine of the Virgin Birth is nonsense ; she does not say, " My mosquito brain finds it nonsense ". Mr Beresford writes, " The dogmas of the Churches seem to me to be utterly at variance with the Spirit of Christ " ; he does not write, " The dogmas of the Churches seem to my paltry little reason to be utterly at variance with the Spirit of Christ ". What I cannot make out is why they believe in their reason when it tells them a thing is untrue, but will not use it to find out whether a thing is true—to find out, for example, whether a God exists.

I say, I cannot make it out ; I do not mean that I am surprised at their attitude, for it is simply the attitude of the moderns. The moderns have a real contempt for truth. They say a great deal, to be sure, about the love of truth, but what do they mean by it? When they talk

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about truth they mean not saying that the battle of Hastings was fought in 1065. They mean mere accuracy in matters of ascertainable fact. They will *check* their beliefs by rational considerations, expunging the Fall from their theology because it does not seem to fit in with Darwinian speculations about the origin of the human species, or discrediting the whole doctrine of the Papacy because St Peter neglected to carve up his name anywhere in the Colosseum. But their beliefs, such beliefs as remain, are not *based* on rational considerations. They believe in God because he is necessary to their imagination, not because he is necessary to their thought; in immortality because it commends itself to their sentiment, not because it commends itself to their intellect. Confront them with a metaphysical speculation, and they excuse themselves on the ground of brain-fag. Upon my word, I have more patience with Mr Bertrand Russell, who at least believes that he has tried to smell out the trail of absolute truth, and found it cold. These others have no stomach for the quest; to them, Truth is but a series of notice-boards, announcing "No Road Here"; and they slink, baffled, away.

Baffled, but not confessing that they are baffled. They screen their disappointment with an affectation of unconcern, treat the fruits of the intellect as sour grapes at best, and propose to us a quite different method of arriving at eternal truths—perhaps it would be safer to say, eternal values. They point us to mystical experiences, their own

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or another's, as the solution of the difficulty. Mr Raymond's procedure in the article from which I have already quoted is particularly illuminating. He can remember that there used to be five metaphysical proofs of the existence of God ; he can even name them, getting two out of the five right. But having named them, does he examine their value? Not at all ; he is out for higher game. " There is no room to examine these here—you will find them arrayed in any book of Christian evidences—nor would they fit in with my purpose, which is to affirm that God can only be finally apprehended by what is known as intuitive perception ". Now, I do not know what is the value of that word " finally " ; if it means " exhaustively ", the whole sentiment is of course nonsense ; if it means " permanently ", " securely ", then we must be pardoned for insisting that Mr Raymond is shirking his own issue. He is not going to discuss the Five Proofs, because he is about to affirm that God can *only* be finally apprehended by intuitive perception. But that means affirming that God cannot be finally known *in any other way* ; *i.e.* that he cannot be finally known by the Five Proofs ; and how is he justified in affirming that, if he refuses to discuss the Five Proofs altogether?

Actually, of course, he is confusing two different things ; he is confusing the knowledge of God with the knowledge that God exists. Nobody pretends that the natural reason can give us any knowledge of God, except by means of abstractions ; what we do claim for the five proofs is

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that they justify us in believing that there is a God to be known. Mr Raymond wants us to take a short cut, and set out to know God without bothering to inquire whether he exists or not. God can only be finally known, he tells us, by an intuitive perception. Personally, I have not got it ; how am I to get it? By assuming, as a hypothesis, that God exists, and saying my prayers accordingly? But it must be a strange kind of intuitive perception, this, which needs spiritual preparation if it is to be attained. And what answer am I to make to the atheist, when he tells me that I have hypnotized myself into religion by the methods of the late Dr Coué?

There is no doubt how Mr Raymond would avoid this difficulty. He would tell us that if you have not got this intuitive perception of God yourself, you must trust the guidance of others who have ; namely, of those religious leaders whom he describes as “ experts ” in religion. After all, he would say, some of us have no ear for music, some of us no eye for painting ; but we do not on that account, unless we are intellectual coxcombs, deny the existence of musical or artistic values. We trust the expert ; we let him decide for us, where the limitations of our own faculties prevent us from forming an opinion. The man who has a small appreciation of music does not assume that this small appreciation exhausts the subject ; he is willing to believe that others, who have started out with higher gifts and have devoted a lifetime to the study of the subject, are worth listening to—he takes their word

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for the conclusions which they have reached. So with religion ; the man in the street may have only a faint and wavering perception of the Divine ; but it is sufficient to make him attentive to the views of others more expert than himself. He recognizes that the religious experience of Buddha (or Keats) is vastly superior to his own ; he accepts them, therefore, as guides, and is prepared to "bet his life that there is a God" on the strength of their assurances.

Now, there are several partial objections which might make us hesitate to accept this comparison. For example, that in a specialized age like our own the worship of the expert is already being overdone, and that it is time the public reacted a little against its self-appointed mentors, lest we come to forget the story of *The Emperor's New Clothes*. Or again, that in the arts we recognize two classes of gifted persons, the creative artist who produces the work, and the critic who pronounces on its value ; whereas in this business of religion it appears that the artist and the critic are one and the same person, in itself a matter for distrust. But the true objection lies deeper. It is one thing to take a man's word for it that some object of experience is good, or has a meaning beyond what we can see in it ; quite another thing to take a man's word for it that an Object, not presented to our own experience, exists. A splash of colour on canvas is presented to my eyes, and it may be that I am prepared to believe Mr Roger Fry when he tells me that there is a harmony and a rhythm

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about it which my untutored perceptions cannot appreciate. But if a Theosophist tells me that there is an aura round my head of a particular colour, I am less inclined to admit myself in the wrong ; it may be, after all, that there is something wrong with the Theosophist.

In music, or in the arts, I am only asked to take it on trust that a given series of colours or sounds is attractive to a rightly trained eye or ear. If I believe in the existence of absolute standards in art, that is my own affair ; the expert tells me nothing about that ; he only tells me that the object of appreciation gives him pleasure, and his pleasure is of a more educated type than my own ; if I would go to a few more concerts, I should learn to prefer Bach to Gounod. It is all a matter of values ; there is no question of fact. Now, are the moderns prepared to make religion a mere matter of values ? Mr Middleton Murry would have no hesitation, I think, in saying Yes ; but what of Mr Raymond ? What of Mr Walpole ? What of Mr Drinkwater ? Are they really content with believing that we have, tucked away in us somewhere, a faculty for appreciating spiritual values ; and that if we exercise that faculty sufficiently, we shall find our nature uplifted in the process, just as it is uplifted by the appreciation of art ? *Is that all ?* Are they content to leave it an unsolved question, whether any Unseen Power really exists, to which this faculty of ours is somehow related ? If they want to go further, if they want us to believe that such a power exists, then they must not argue directly from the existence

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of a faculty in ourselves to the existence of a supernatural Reality to which it has reference ; for that is invalid proof. The spiritual expert is within his rights if he says : “ I feel as if a God existed ; I enjoy feeling as if a God existed ; the people who do not feel like that are missing a great deal, they are leaving a whole side of their nature undeveloped ; if they would only cultivate peace and retirement more, enter into themselves more and purify their own minds, they would feel (like myself) as if a God existed ”. All that he may say ; but he must not say “ God exists ”. That is arguing from a state of mind to an Object existing in the real order of things ; and the proof does not carry the weight put upon it.

The affectation of the symposiasts is to despise the reason in religious matters, as men who have a higher faculty to guide them and a higher court to appeal to. But at the root of their attitude I suspect a fear and an indolence ; fear of what the reason might reveal if it were left to itself, indolence in view of the intellectual responsibility which such an appeal would rest on their shoulders ; they would have to think, and to argue. As literary men, they prefer to create an imaginative atmosphere ; they fall back consequently on the formula, too frequently exploited by Christians in the last century, “ Ah, my dear fellow, if you only knew ! ” I do not say that this appeal is never effective ; I do not even say there is no value at all in it ; I confine myself to the observation that it comes very badly from people like the symposiasts, who have admittedly

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thrown over the religion of their childhood on the ground that it was unreasonable. If Mr Walpole says "Ah, my dear fellow, if you only knew!" to Sir Arthur Keith, why should not I say "Ah, my dear fellow, if you only knew!" to Mr Walpole? I must apologize for the impertinence of the suggestion, but so far as logic is concerned it seems to me that he has brought the retort on himself.

There is, to be sure, a plausible kind of humility about appealing to the "spiritual experts". The symposiast courts the favour of the public by his ingenuous admission, "I do not profess to apprehend religious values very clearly myself; but then, you see, I am not such a good man as Buddha, for example, or Christ". But essentially this humility is a mask; nor is there any theologian who takes a graver responsibility on himself than the eclectic. For what is his argument? "I find", he insists, "that Christ, Buddha, St Francis, Goethe, and Keats were spiritual experts. I do not agree with all they said; indeed, it would be difficult for me to do so; but I agree with all the essential points in their system, and I have decided for myself which points are and which are not essential. The interpretation of their utterances is sometimes a matter of dispute, but I have my own ideas about it, and I am quite sure they are right". It is the symposiast himself who impanels St Francis in the jury, not St Thomas Aquinas; Buddha, not Mohammed; Keats, not Dr Johnson. It is the symposiast who abridges for himself the Sermon on the Mount. It

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is the symposiast who rationalizes (in Mr Beresford's vein) the doctrine of the Fourth Gospel. And by this arbitrary process he distils for us a synthetic religion of his own, a kind of Vitamin B, guaranteed to have all the same effects as the pure milk of the word. In the end, we have only his assurance for it.

I am bound to confess that in their appeal to the spiritual expert the symposiasts are only following the example set them by professedly Christian writers of a modern school. Let me recall once more the ominous words of Dr Glover : " For my own life and thought, I find I lay more and more stress upon the authority of Christ. I go by the authority of the expert, where I cannot test the evidence myself. In this matter of immortality as of some others (such as pain), I base much on the fact that he at all events did believe in immortality, and that he based himself here on a more intimate insight into God than most of us have reached ". I do not know what Dr Glover's private Christology may be, but it is evident that in this passage, perhaps out of tenderness for the scruples of his audience, his language has something of a Nestorian tang ; he is not using the word " authority " in any traditional sense. If Christian writers thus appeal to our Lord as if he were merely one among the great spiritual authors, they must be prepared for less orthodox thinkers to take other counsel as well.

But, however much we admit the right of the symposiast to choose his own prophets and to edit and interpret their

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prophecies, at least let us try to persuade him that he cannot have it both ways ; that if he abandons the use of the intellect he may succeed in recommending religious values, but not in establishing religious truth. When I say *truth*, I mean plain truth of fact, not anything else. If a God exists, his existence is just as much a plain fact as the existence of the pillar-box round the corner ; and if Julius Cæsar's soul is alive in another world it is as much a fact as the fact that he once was alive in this. I wonder whether the symposiasts would agree with me here? I sometimes get the uneasy sense that they are using words in a sense which is wholly unfamiliar to me. That statement of Mr Walpole's, for example, in *Where are the Dead?*: "It may be, as has been said, that we shall find after physical death that what man has believed on this earth, that he is afterwards given for truth"—what exactly is he driving at? Does he mean that the people who think they will be immortal will be immortal, and the people who expect to be snuffed out like a candle will be snuffed out? If that is all, one can appreciate the sentiment without agreeing with it. But this talk of being "given a thing for truth" makes me wonder whether there is not some subtler philosophical idea underlying the phrase ; whether Mr Walpole does not somehow conceive of Truth as a thing which exists merely for the individual mind, and has no relation to external reality at all. If so, I must part company with him, for I cannot breathe in that atmosphere of thought. When I talk about religious

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truth, I mean the answer to the question *whether there is really Something there.*

I want to know whether it is really thinkable that Spirit was evolved by Matter, the higher by the lower ; or that Spirit evolved itself out of Matter, the non-existent causing itself to exist ; or whether there is some Spirit who existed before Matter was, and drew our human spirits out of that void. I want to know whether it is thinkable that there should be, in the whole of visible nature, a sequence of order and of law, which our minds can detect though they did not put it there, unless there be a Mind other than our own which brought order out of all the possibilities of chaos ; whether it is thinkable that the problem which science sets itself to unravel got there by accident, or whether a puzzle which needs a mind to solve it does not need a Mind to set it. I want to know whether it is possible that such a thing as Force or Spirit should exist in the concrete, without being the function of a Person ; whether such a neuter notion of Force or Spirit is not a mere abstraction, which can have no existence outside our minds ; whether the scientist who personifies Nature with a capital N is not falling back into the rudest superstitions of paganism. If I could find any answer to these and a hundred allied questions other than the Christian answer, then I would not greatly exercise myself over religious "values", or envy those picked souls in the world's history who have thought that they had lifted, in some moment of ecstasy, the veil that covers the unseen.

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Give me the certainty that *there is a Person there*, and I will do my best to find out what is his will for me, and trust my fortunes to his keeping, in this world or in another, with what loving confidence I may. Short of that, I will make no mention of religion in my vocabulary; at the best it is a fad, at the worst a fallacy. I may be a bigot, I may be a pedant; but I believe I have the ordinary Englishman with me here. He does not want "religion"; he wants God.

And if you tell him that he knows God by an intuitive perception, you will only make him unhappy. He is fully conscious that the word came into his vocabulary when he was a child, when he was accustomed to accept from his elders a multitude of traditions, some of which his riper mind has discarded; that he has lived with the idea and grown accustomed to it, that it has formed part of a fairyland which he would like to find true. Precisely for that reason, he distrusts the sentiment; he suspects himself of fostering a grateful illusion, suspects that the wish was father to the thought. The notion of God fits in with his higher ideals, with his dearer hopes; all the more reason to surmise that it has been coined, by successive ages of mythology, for that purpose. The very reason why you ask him to believe in God, namely, that he *wants* to believe in God, is his main reason for doubting. The elders, when they heard Helen plead, made allowances for the beauty of her voice, lest they should be spell-bound by its influence; what if this hope, too, should be an illusion of the Sirens?

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The Englishman wants truth of fact ; you will not get him to replace it by artistic values. The pressure of fact is all around him, reflected in the daily urgency of living ; you must give him a metaphysic of fact, for the alternative is despair.

XIII

RELIGION AND THE FUTURE

WE claim a divine guarantee for the promise that the Catholic Church will last to the end of time. It is a tradition among us Catholics that it will always be the most numerous among the Christian bodies. But meanwhile, there is nothing to prevent a fresh kind of non-Catholic religion growing up in the world, and commanding the homage of millions. If this should happen, will it be, or be indebted to, the religion of the symposiasts?

“Some people think”, writes Mr Hannen Swaffer in the *I believe* series, “that all the truth was given to man all at once. Some people think that Moses learned it all; others think they see in Christ, or in Buddha, or Mohammed all the truth there is in all the world. They do not know that revelation goes on from age to age, that revelation means revolution, that the more the world resists a truth the more important it must be. Religion consists in protecting your own old-fashioned truth against a newer revelation. You inflict on the next generation the persecution from which you yourself have suffered. The Pilgrim Fathers called it burning witches. Rome calls it the Index Expurgatorius. The Church of England calls it Dr Barnes”.

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The meaning of the last three sentences must be left to charitable conjecture. But the thesis as a whole is plain—namely, that there is no finality about religious truth, only a series of “revelations”, the newest always containing more truth than the newest but one, and enduring accordingly from the newest but one the persecution appropriate to its juniority of standing—much as school-boys, when they reach the Sixth Form, learn to keep the fags in their place. Mr Swaffer assumes, what is open to doubt, that every new religion is persecuted; assumes, with still greater boldness, that every religion which is persecuted is to that extent true. And he crowns his assumptions by inferring, apparently, that we are getting nearer and nearer to the truth as we go on—unless, indeed, he thinks that the truth itself alters as time goes on, which is perhaps possible to a symposiast, but will hardly commend itself to the ordinary mind.

It is, no doubt, roughly true that all new religious movements have to undergo criticism, and sometimes active repression, from the supporters of a traditional theology. But that is no test of their survival value. Some innovators—the Adamites, for example, and John of Leyden’s followers—have been plain fanatics from the outset, and were exterminated. But as a rule what kills a new religion is not the trials which greet its first appearance, but the slackening off among its members which follows upon the first hundred years or so of its existence. And to suppose that these successive movements represent a progressive

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approximation to religious truth, or indeed a progressive tendency in any direction at all, is to disregard their history. They are flung up as mysteriously as the waves of the sea, and for all practical purposes disappear as completely. Nor can the religious beliefs of the modern world, such as they are, be legitimately attributed to their influence. That spirit of toleration, for example, of which the symposiasts make so much, is the outcome not of any new creed but of a general movement in public thought quite external to religion. We are what we are not because of what Wesley or Simeon believed, but in spite of what Wesley and Simeon believed. The effervescence of their enthusiasm has subsided, and we are much where we were (I am speaking of the bulk of the population) in the middle of the eighteenth century.

Any considerable religious upheaval will leave its mark on history, on literature, sometimes on philanthropy ; but its direct influence is limited to the period during which it is active ; nothing overflows from it, commonly, into those forms of spiritual endeavour which succeed it. It is not a contributory element, as it were, to a steady hydraulic pressure ; it foams, and is spent. But for all that, it may be argued that the periodic recurrence of these "revelations" is a good thing for the spiritual progress of mankind, purifies its system, if we may vary the metaphor, and tones up its ideals ; it may be argued, therefore, that it is high time some fresh "revelation" came along, to arouse our dead age. It is in this sense, I suppose, that

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Miss West concludes her article with a hint about the future. "But even when Christianity is stripped of doctrines", she writes, "that were created to serve a special purpose, but now serve none, there is no reason to suppose that it is the final revelation of the Divine to humanity. There might quite possibly come another world that would be to us as absolute a solvent of our difficulties about life as Christianity was to the difficulties of the early Christians". She seems to think, indeed, that this new revelation would have an even better chance of success than the Christian revelation itself. "I find confirmation of that hope in the feeling of sacredness that I intuitively perceive in all efforts to extend the sphere of personal liberty. When we let people do what they like and say what they like we are giving the Divine a chance to express itself when it comes. The spirit of tolerance represents the merciful hand of Christ thrust through the ages, saving the next Christ from crucifixion".

I do not think that the last part of her peroration need detain us. It all seems to me highly questionable; the cynic, I should have thought, would be inclined to suggest that all new religious movements thrive on rebuffs, and that if Miss West's new revelation comes along, and is not persecuted, it will rapidly die of inanition. We might even suggest, from a less cynical and more mystical point of view, that if the second Christ is to be saved from crucifixion, the first Christ did not want to be. And if the second Christ is to be worthy of the first,

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he will say to Miss West, "Get thee behind me, Satan".

But let us grant, whatever its prospects of salutary persecution, that a new "revelation" is due. Of what kind is it likely to be? Of what kind must it be (so far as human prescience can pronounce on such issues) if it is to command any considerable following? I would respectfully submit these ideas to the symposiasts, as my own private opinions on the matter, claiming for myself only that liberty of prophecy which they are so anxious to guarantee to all our fellow-citizens.

In the first place, I believe that if there is a new revelation it will be a Christian one. Of course, when I say this I am assuming that at the time in question our Western civilization will still be maintaining itself; that we shall not have been overrun by the more prolific races of the East. While the race-memory and the race-consciousness of Europe maintain their present colouring, I do not believe that any message will find an appeal which does not mask itself, at least, under the name of Christian. The history of the connexion between Europe and Christendom is the history of a great romance; it is the kind of romance which leaves its mark permanently and destroys the capacity for other loves. There can be no revival of an earlier past; all the suggestions made for a return to paganism have been the affectations of a literary clique; they found no echo in the minds of men. Whether we were right or wrong to accept Christianity with Constantine, we crossed

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in that act our spiritual Rubicon, and there is no returning. In many countries, to be sure, it is only a faint memory of historical Christendom that survives, like a blurred daguerreotype of a face once loved ; but, however much we forget, we cannot recover our lost youth ; we cannot be heart-free any more. False Christs and false prophets will arise, we are told, and will deceive many ; but not many, I think, among the heirs of the old civilization ; they have used up, in that great adventure of Christendom, a lifetime's capacity for love. With whatever portents the new religion is heralded—and no religion ever yet went far that was not heralded by portents—we shall remember the old things, and balance them regretfully against the new. Our bones are not young enough to accustom themselves to some new posture of worship ; Christendom will suffice for us, and will outlive us ; we cannot give ourselves again.

The next point which I foresee about this revelation is that it will be severely ethical in character. The scoffers have been at us for centuries, and the symposiasts are at us still, for being after all no better than our neighbours ; they remind us of Pope Alexander the Sixth, and the grocer telling the boy to come down to prayers when he has finished putting sand in the sugar. But they know—indeed, it is the whole point of the joke, and the secret of the animus which lies behind it—that the Christian morality is a difficult one, for anybody who is going to take it seriously ; that it is exacting in its demands on

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nature, and pricks, even where it does not command, the conscience. And our nature is such—or, if you will, that second nature of habit, implanted in us by nineteen centuries of Christianity, is such—that we cannot feel any respect for a religion which does not demand more of us than we feel we want to give. Nor will it rest content merely to sanction the current ethical ideas of our time, telling us to be honest and sincere and peace-loving, to refrain from back-biting and from cruelty to others. Religion must take command ; it will not play second fiddle to utilitarian ethics. It may teach an exaggerated morality, demanding total prohibition or the sweeping away of race-courses, but it will preach individual as well as social duties, will want the whole Decalogue, not the copy-book version.

That is one reason, I think, why the two most talked-of religions which belong to our time, Christian Science and Spiritualism, remain cults rather than movements, capture the leisured rather than the poor as their devotees. There are three facts in man's life which a complete religion offers to put in their right perspective—the problem of suffering, the fear of death, and the sense of sin. Christian Science has specialized on the first, Spiritualism on the second ; both alike, as it seems to me, have neglected the urgency of the third. To the Christian Scientist, I understand, sin is an illusion like all other forms of evil, and our aim must be to boycott it by blinding ourselves to its existence—not an easy demand to make of ordinary people. The Spiritualist has overcome his fear of whatever

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terrors were supposed to lie beyond the grave; and, while he receives admirable moral advice, doubtless, from his familiars, is not enlightened by any theology of sin or of its consequences. The more these cults—the latter especially—succeed in winning ground, the less will be their strictly religious appeal. If miracles of healing became as common as the Christian Scientist would wish, they would be attributed to some natural law of cause and effect, hitherto undiscovered, and we should take them for granted instead of getting excited about them. If the companionship of the dead became as familiar to us as the companionship of the living, the mystery would vanish, and all the element of faith which the system still demands; nor should we, I think, spend much time in evoking the departed spirits unless they contrived to make their conversation more interesting than it is at present. In either case, the fruits of victory would disappear in the victor's hands; it is only because either case is still unproved that they continue to exercise fascination.

I say, the new revelation would have a strong theology of sin, and it would need, to back that up, definite views about the hereafter. If men are to take their sins seriously, they must be conscious of the shadows which they throw upon the screen of eternity. I do not mean that it is impossible for a religion to exert a profound influence on men's consciences without keeping eschatological terrors in the foreground of its system. But I cannot imagine any movement sweeping the country with a new religious

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force which did not threaten as well as persuade. Mr Stacpoole observes, in *My Religion*, that "hell is not preached to-day as it was in those days, and, in consequence perhaps, the Church of convention has partly lost its hold upon the public"; and I think he is probably in the right of it.

The next point about the new revelation is that it will have to reveal something. And here it will be singularly unlike the theological notions of the symposiasts; for they, as we have seen, decry the whole idea of doctrinal tradition; they do not want truth to be passed on, in any assertive form, from one human being to another, for that is "dogma". Now, a revelation which is made to a private individual for his own sake may consist in "ineffable words which it is not lawful to man to utter"; but in that case there is no *public* revelation; the generality of men are none the wiser. Something must be revealed to the prophet which he, in his turn, can make known to others; some new aspect of religious truth, some new title of the Divinity or form of worship, which has, supposedly, supernatural sanction. It is no good for the prophet to sit down and think out some religious slogan, of the type dear to sub-editors; we have had all too many of these in recent years, and they did not prove rallying-cries, precisely because they were human, and admittedly human, in their invention. The prophet's business is not to sit down and think something out, but to rise from his knees suddenly possessed of a new saving formula which

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he can preach to his fellows. A mere slogan like Dr Torrey's "Get right with God" may serve the turn of an advertisement campaign, but will not be a permanent inspiration for multitudes of human lives. The prophet must announce the imminent destruction of the world, or must bring to light some inspired document, like the Golden Plates of Mormonism, or must at least popularize some new system of worship, if he is to secure attention. Probably it will be necessary for him at the same time to re-establish the credit of the Bible, in the Fundamentalist sense. It is singular to notice how strictly all "revelations" since the Christian era have taken either the Old or the New Testament for their model.

There are periods of action in the world's history, and periods of reflection; ours is predominantly a period of reflection, in which we are for ever reassessing our judgments of the past, basing our calculations on statistics, and demanding a firm basis of induction before we experiment. Such a period is more likely to produce a philosophy of religion than a religion; and it is our weakness that we continue to offer philosophies of religion as a substitute for religion itself. But if we are to have a new revelation it must come from a man of action rather than a man of thought; someone who will not mind being decried as a fanatic, like his predecessors before him. He will not say, "After giving forty years to the study of comparative religion, I have come to the conclusion . . ."; he will say "Thus saith the Lord". He will not claim to be

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a spiritual expert ; he will claim to be a Voice from Heaven.

It will be seen that I am not sanguine about the prospect of a revelation such as Mr Swaffer and Miss West desiderate. I must not be accused of saying that a prophet of the sort I have described is likely to appear ; I do not think so. It seems to me that the native energies of Protestantism have been failing this last century and a half, and have no strength now to put forth a new birth. I only say that if we *are* to have an inspiration which will lift the popular religion of England from the rut into which it has fallen, vitalize it and make it count among the forces at work in the country, it will have to be something conceived on these lines. It will have to be a new birth ; there will be no spontaneous generation out of the decayed matter of our modern theologies.

Meanwhile, our guiding spirit is a humanitarianism, not a religion. I do not decry this humanitarianism ; I have nothing but admiration for its fine ideals of conduct, and wish that I myself and all other Christians observed its precepts more successfully. What I do regret is the habit of describing it as a religion ; and still more the implication, frequently found, that it is the legitimate development of the Christian message. For, unfortunately, such language is likely to encourage an existing tendency in the non-Catholic theology of to-day. I mean, of course, the tendency to whittle away the content of Christian doctrine, eliminating more and more the miraculous and the super-

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natural from the pulpit ; abandoning that partial rule of faith which the Bible once gave, and replacing it by some vague standard miscalled “ the authority of the Church ”, which changes and weakens with every decade. I do not feel at all sure that what is the doctrine of the higher journalists to-day will not be the doctrine of the pulpit a hundred years hence.

And what will the higher journalists themselves be saying, a hundred years hence? Are we to take Mr Stacpoole’s hint, “ We have still a long way to go ”, and suppose that a later Gigadibs will be heaping scorn on our symposiasts for their unchristian habit of eating mutton-chops, and sending people to prison for an offence no worse than stealing? Is everything to proceed in a straight line? Or have we reached the final development of our ethical thought? Or will there be—is it possible that there should ever be—reactions? Revolts of a younger generation still from the revolts of our own? I do not dare to prophesy ; I must only be pardoned for a certain feeling of satisfaction that my own religious sentiments are not so uncomfortably dependent on the moods of an age ; so likely to earn, from our grandchildren, the contemptuous epithet “ Georgian ”.

There is a religious institution, much criticized for its immutability, which, a hundred years ago, was baptizing perhaps one in a hundred and twenty children born in England, and is now baptizing one in twelve. Towards that institution the backwash of our modern movements

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is at present drifting a minority of inquirers, unsatisfied with humanitarianism and naturalism and all that the Press calls religion. Whether that tide is likely to grow in volume it is not for me to prophesy. But I know that we shall remain, the critics of some new outlook a hundred years hence ; and claiming the right to criticize because, in the twentieth century, we kept our heads.

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